

INSIDE THE MYSTERIOUS
WORLD OF RECORE

EXPLORING MIYAZAKI'S
BRUTAL DARK SOULS III

HELP BUILD A GAME WITH
XBOX GAME PREVIEW!



XBOX

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

The Ghosts take on
an entire country!

25

XBOX 360 CULT
CLASSICS WE
WANT ON
XBOX ONE

HITMAN IS BACK!

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eight ways
to kill...

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

EA

Be Boba Fett. Fight on Hoth. Duel with Darth.
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 XBOX ONE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Bigger, better, boxier



"IT FINALLY FEELS LIKE A PROPER XBOX ONE LEAP"

Cast an eye over this month's previews section and you'll find a lineup with something for everyone, whether it's open-world hostage negotiations, free-running in a dystopian future or, erm, chopping off a samurai's head with a viking's axe. After two years of publishers awkwardly straddling the last and current gens, it finally feels like a proper Xbox One leap. And all this before getting to our mighty cover star. *Star Wars Battlefront* blew us away at E3, finally achieving what so much promotional puff has promised us in the past: putting you *in* the movies. Step into Darth Vader's size tens and prepare to cause some havoc!

Matthew

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Meet the... OXM CONTRIBUTORS



Alex Dale
Deputy editor

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Alex wasted most of the month dreaming up Bolivia puns for his *Ghost Recon Wildlands* preview. 'Seeing is Bolivian'? Nope. 'La Paz-manian Devils'? That's a reach. 'Perutiful'? Wrong country, you dummy.



Tom Stone
Staff writer

Live OXM [Tom Stone](#)

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[@TheTomStrange](#)

Tom subscribes to the 'method acting' school of game reviewing: that's why he expensed a trip to the zoo for *Tembo*, and spent the rest of the month on the golf course for *PGA Tour*. He is so reviewing *DOOM*.



Emma Davies
Production editor

Live OXM [Emma](#)

Twitter [@emcetera](#)

Emma was the only team member deemed disposable enough to be allowed to go to Glastonbury festival this year. Rumors that she spent the entire weekend furious that 'deadmau5' isn't capitalized are... depressingly true.



Joe Skrebels
Community manager

Live OXM [Joe](#)

Twitter [@2plus2isjoe](#)

Joe spent a rowdy week on a boat this month, as part of a friend's bachelor party celebrations. "The experience reminded me of a Rare game," said an ashen-faced Skrebs the next Monday. *Cobra Triangle*? "Nope - *Sea of Heaves*"



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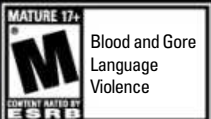
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*Halo: Nightfall: 5 episode live-action series is streaming only, and will initially be available on a weekly basis, and then on demand. Xbox One or Windows 8.1 and broadband internet required; ISP fees apply. Halo 5: Guardians Beta: Game disc required. Limited-time beta starts December 27, 2014, and ends January 22, 2015. Must be 17+. Xbox One, broadband internet (ISP fees apply) and Xbox LIVE Gold membership (sold separately) required. Halo: Nightfall and Halo 5: Guardians Beta dates, content, and features subject to change. See www.xbox.com/halo



XBOX ONE

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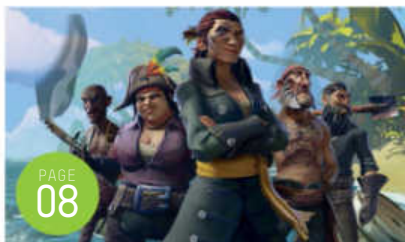
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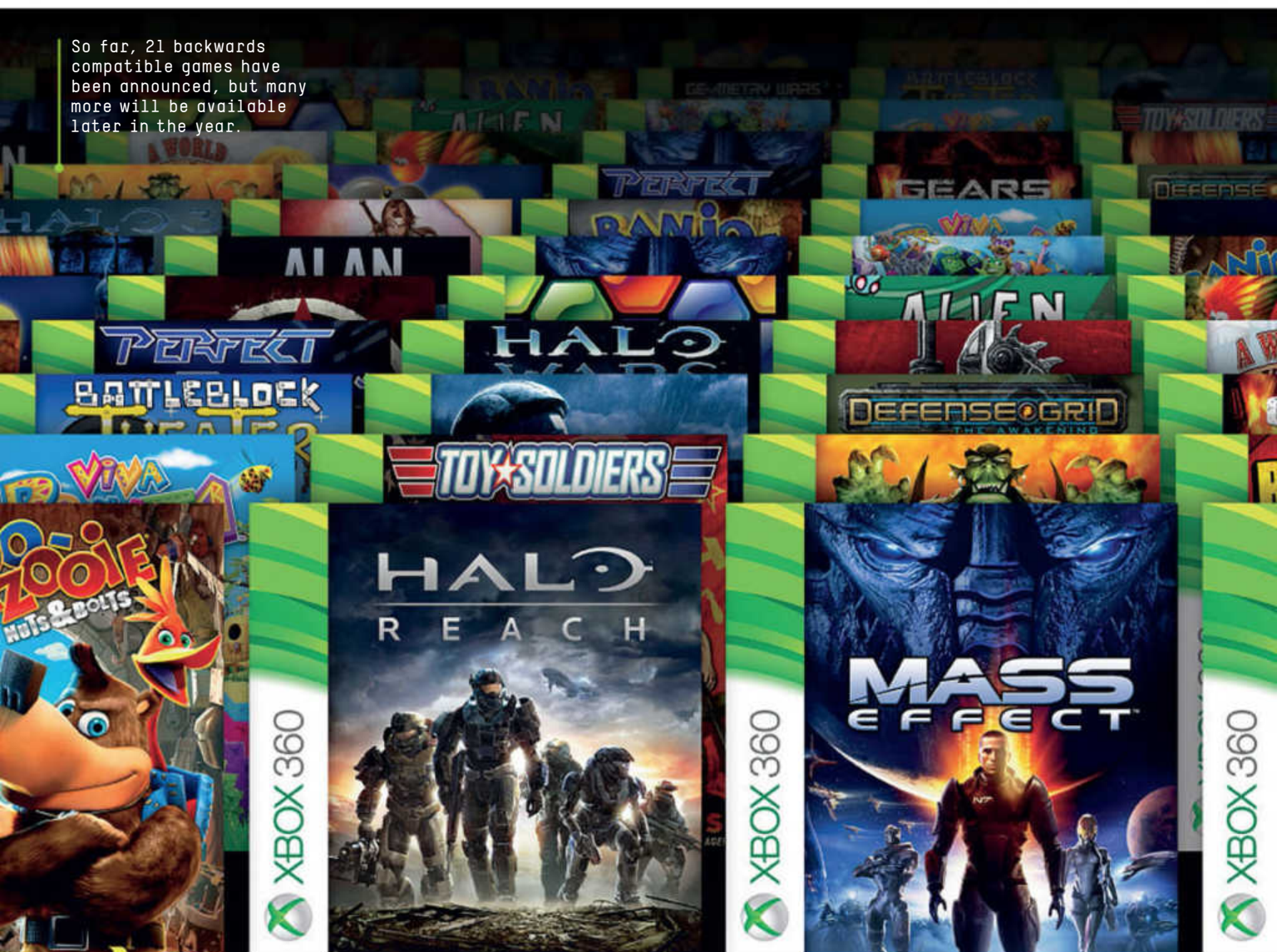
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INSIDER

XBOX NEWS, ANALYSIS, CULTURE, OPINION & MORE

So far, 21 backwards compatible games have been announced, but many more will be available later in the year.



BACK FROM THE FUTURE

THE FULL 360

Armed with backwards compatibility and game previews, the Xbox One of 2015 is a triumphant marriage of nostalgia and ambition



Pitchford slates Aliens lawsuit

Gearbox boss Randy Pitchford has commented on a failed lawsuit against the studio over the quality of *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, describing it as a case of "Mafia-style extortion tactics" and insisting that the open market is the ultimate arbitrator.



ZombiU Xbox port rumoured

An Xbox One edition of WiiU launch title *ZombiU* appears to be in the works. The rumoured port (rather forlornly titled *Zombi*) has been rated by both Taiwan and Australia's certification boards. Watch out for an announcement from publisher Ubisoft.

//BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY IS THE
LAST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE MICROSOFT
HAS BEEN TRYING TO SOLVE//



At \$150 it's not cheap, but the new Elite controller offers an array of customization options.



Rare has described *Sea of Thieves* as its "most ambitious effort ever". We can't wait.

To know where you're going, embrace where you've come from. Thus the subtext of Microsoft's decision to support Xbox 360 compatibility on Xbox One. The move is unlikely to have much of a direct impact on the younger console's market uptake – previous generations have demonstrated that backwards compatibility isn't a huge sales draw – though it'll probably sway a few last-gen holdouts who are already tempted by the likes of *Halo 5*. But the symbolism of it can't be overstated.

This is the final and most decisive of Microsoft's efforts to re-establish the through-line with the halcyon years of Xbox 360, the last piece of a puzzle the manufacturer has been trying to solve since deterring many fans with a mixture of Kinect-heavy entertainment features and restrictive online policies back in 2013. It's not just that you can play *BattleBlock Theater* or *Viva Piñata* on your Xbox One now – it's that the era that gave us those no longer feels at odds with the era that gave us *Titanfall* and *D4*.

This point extends to more than just backwards compatibility, of course. It's apparent in how Microsoft has nurtured and evolved its core first-party properties, allowing new teams to get to grips with them while taking care not to depart too dramatically from its formula. The restoration of the original *Gears of War* alongside a suspenseful trailer for *Gears 4* is a reassurance that we won't be treated to another *Judgment*-style experiment.

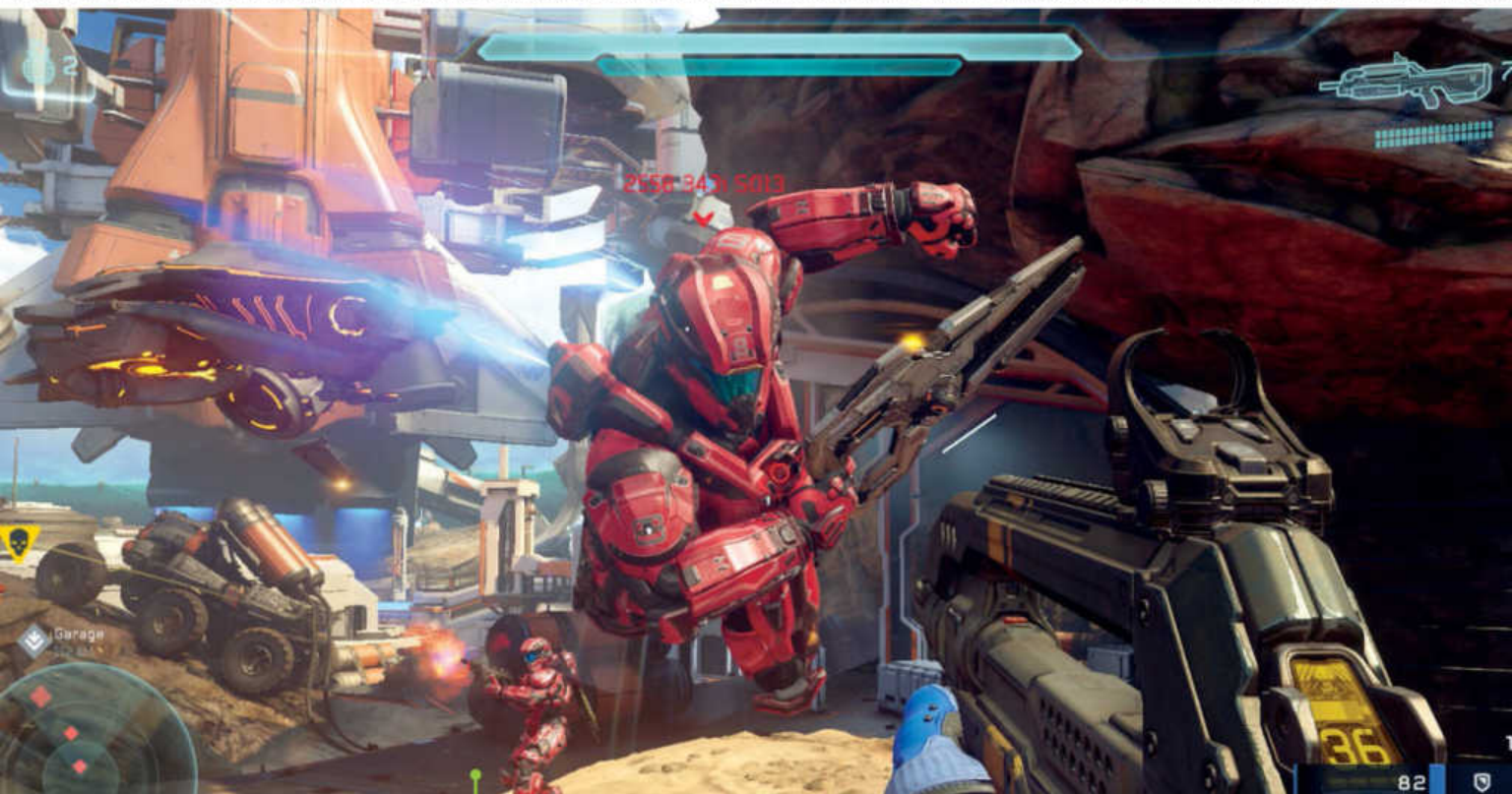
Halo 5 might have attracted umbrage lately for its scripted-seeming campaign and lack of split-screen, but we'd challenge you to sit through a colossal Warzone threeway or a snappy bout of Breakout and not feel as giddy as a *Halo 3* player making his first run on a Covenant Scarab.

Forza's deft alternation between the open world mayhem of *Horizon* and the car anorak perfectionism of the numbered series is a masterclass in how to innovate within a brand. And Rare Ltd, finally, is back in the spotlight for reasons other than its long dalliance with Kinect. It's early days, but the forthcoming *Sea of Thieves* has the potential to be a wonderful meeting of past and



Call of Duty stays frosty

The "Juggernaut" edition of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 3* will ship with a working fridge, modeled on the in-game Perk-a-Cola machine. It's an ice touch.



present – the cuddly esthetic and action emphasis of a vintage Rare game, plus the water physics and online community element of a *Kinect Sports Rivals*.

It's hard to get as excited about the next Dashboard revision, which switches out the old 'Metro' tile interface for a Windows 10-inspired array of feeds, but then again, that's kind of the point. Where *Metro* was designed to push Kinect controls to the fore, its large panels suiting grab-and-swipe motion controls, the new front end is all about getting out of your way. Switching between functions is noticeably faster, and accessing platform features while playing a game is much less fiddly – rather than compressing the view to fiddle with a Snapped app or retreating to the main Dash, you'll pop out a tab that unifies your Friends list, party invites, messages and key settings such as game-to-chat volume ratios.

The introduction of Cortana, Microsoft's Siri-style voice-controlled search app, also promises to make life easier for multi-taskers: you can order it to break off a chunk of footage, upload it and add a caption in the

The new Elite controller will take the Red vs Blue rivalry to a whole new level.

space of a few seconds. The new Elite controller, meanwhile, is a celebration of the lust for a competitive edge that has defined Xbox Live since *Halo 2*'s multiplayer. It's an accessory for players who love to optimize – you can swap in thumbsticks or D-pads, tweak sensitivities and assign extra inputs to under-mounted control paddles.

Were backwards compatibility the only major step-change in Xbox One's future, there'd perhaps be cause for accusations of complacency. But the

feature was announced alongside Xbox Game Previews, the first console-native take on Steam's very successful Early Access program, which allows studios to sell work-in-progress games.

As with Steam, the genius of this is that it transforms players who are willing to overlook placeholder bits and rough edges into collaborators, fellow travellers on the adventure that is creating a game. In allowing studios to tap into that audience early, it'll take a little of the risk out



Oh to have a living room big enough for a *Forza* setup like this...

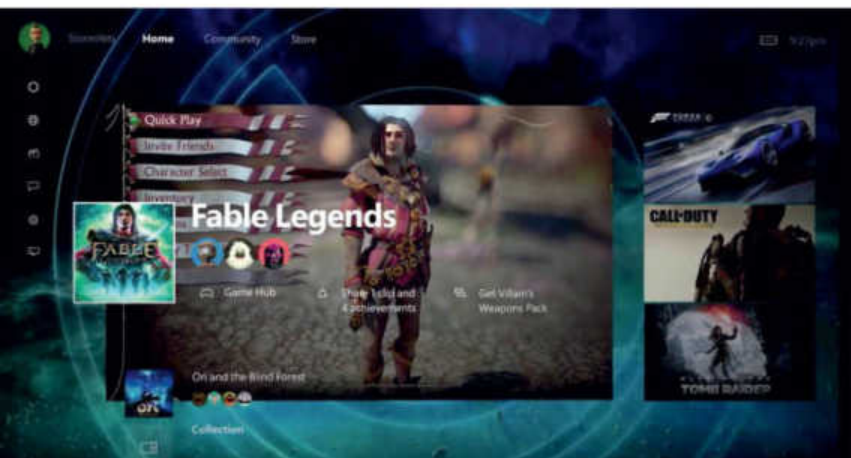


Xbox to skip TGS

Xbox won't have a booth at this year's Tokyo Game Show, reflecting its less-than-stellar sales in the region. Expect "updates" from Microsoft Japan, however.



With 1TB of hard disk space as well as the option to add more external storage, the new Xbox One console gives you loads of room to store your games.



of developing an unfamiliar or inaccessible concept. The result, hopefully, will be more games on Xbox One that are as idiosyncratic or demanding as *The Long Dark*, a survival sim in which your greatest foe is Mother Nature. There will be the odd totally broken release, of course, but support for time-limited free trials should help players dodge that particular bullet (more about that on page 52).

As always when processing the fallout from E3 season, there's the tantalizing thought of what Microsoft didn't show. A notable absentee was Lionhead's new, non-*Fable* IP – expect to hear more about that once *Fable Legends* is out the door. There's also the new zombie survival MMO from Undead Labs, creator of hit Xbox Live Arcade release *State of Decay*, plus the revival of a "beloved" strategy franchise in development at Decisive

Games. And by the time you read this we'll have laid eyes on the much-coveted *Crackdown* reboot, Remedy's time-bending shooter *Quantum Break* and Platinum's dragon 'em up *Scalebound* at Gamescom in Germany.

And of course, there's the fascinating prospect of HoloLens, Microsoft's holographic gaming headset, and the still-unanswered question of exactly how much it will tie into Xbox. The device continues to dazzle – turning a kitchen table into a fully interactive *Minecraft* level is surely one for the history books – but in the wake of E3's revelations, it no longer feels like Xbox One needs a dash of VR magic to sex up its appeal. In revisiting the golden age of Xbox 360, and adapting proven ideas from PC, the console has laid the foundations for a golden age of its own.

Edwin Evans-Thirlwell

//OF COURSE, THERE'S THE FASCINATING PROSPECT OF HOLOLENS, AND THE STILL-UNANSWERED QUESTION OF HOW MUCH IT WILL TIE INTO XBOX//

THIS MONTH WE LEARNED...

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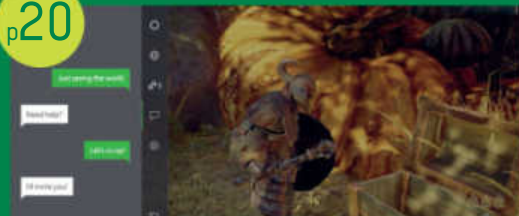
What Keiji Inafune has put at the core of his new game, *ReCore*.

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Some of the many murderous tricks Agent 47 has up his sleeve.

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When Cortana will be arriving on our console Dashboards.

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That Adam Jensen won't get punished for not choosing stealth.

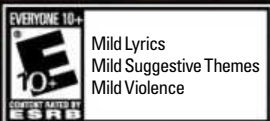
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Why we might feel a tad guilty about drinking human blood.

Microsoft

LEAVE YOUR LIMITS





FORZA **HORIZON 2**

Open it up in a truly massive open-world. From day to night, dirt to pavement. Connect and race with friends in the most realistic—and unreal—driving game out there with more than 200 of the world's greatest cars. Get the demo now on Xbox One.

Features and requirements subject to change. Features vary between Xbox 360 and Xbox One version of game (each sold separately). Xbox One games for use only with Xbox One systems. Games made for Xbox 360 will not work on Xbox One. Xbox LIVE Gold membership (sold separately) required for online multiplayer; multiplayer between Xbox 360 and Xbox One not supported. On Xbox 360, some cars require download from Xbox LIVE (ISP fees apply) and a hard drive. For Xbox 360 4GB, Arcade and Core consoles (hard drive sold separately). Demo available for Xbox One only. Download from Xbox LIVE. 12GB required. ISP fees apply.



DASHBOARD

CORE BLIMEY

ON THE PULL

Joule's arm-mounted Extractor lets her yank out enemy cores. "You've not only destroyed a creature, but gained something as well, and that can be used in an entirely different gameplay system," hints Pacini.

A DOG'S LIFE

As Pacini describes it, Mack's not the dog, but the core itself. "Place him into the dog and he's Mack, the personality, but he'll also inherit some of the robot anatomy - he'll bark and take animalistic animations."

GOING APE

Inserting the core into other frames imbues Mack with new traits. "Put him into a gorilla-type frame and it's still this gentle character, but now he's gruff and bangs his fists and hoots like an ape," explains Pacini.

GETTING TO THE CORE OF THE MATTER

We quiz Keiji Inafune on ReCore, E3's most mysterious game

What's the story?

Never has a reveal been quite so... unrevealing. Three minutes of teaser shows sand, a girl, and a soon-to-be-dead robotic dog. *ReCore*'s creator, Keiji Inafune, is almost as cryptic in person, recounting the entire trailer with added color - she's Joule, the dog's Mack - and relishing in our confusion. "A lot of it is shrouded in mystery: where is this taking place? Why has this place been taken over by robots? Why am I the only lone survivor?" Interview 101, Mr Inafune: we ask the questions.

Why should I care?

Mark Pacini, game director at *ReCore*'s co-developer Armature, paints a more enticing picture of a "third-person action adventure where there's platforming, fast combat and some shooting." Deciding to drop his Riddler routine, Inafune is also keen to emphasise that it's "not just a fast-paced, 'clear the level and hit the next level' design. There is a relationship you form with your companion, a whole different dynamic that's integrated into the game and the story."

What happens next?

Armature makes the magic happen - it's in full production after a year spent prototyping ideas. Considering the studio is staffed by *Metroid Prime*'s creative leads, that's a pretty potent magic. There may even be some *Metroid* in *ReCore*'s DNA. "Your robotic companions become keys to the world, similar to [*Metroid*]'s 'oh I have this thing that allows me to grapple up there'." Any game that channels the spirit of Nintendo's GameCube classic is welcome in our Xbox One slot.



Uncharted + Mass Effect = Star Wars

EA's Motive Studio will work with BioWare's Montreal outfit on a new *Star Wars* game, with ex-*Uncharted* director/writer Amy Hennig in the creative director's chair. That's some pedigree.

RETURN OF THE MACK

Animation subtleties are key to bringing Mack to life. Pacini says no matter what frame you place him in, similarities survive. "Mack always shakes his head, so you'll always see that head shake no matter what frame he has."

ICY RECEPTION

Inafune cites *Lost Planet*, or rather its study of mankind's remnants struggling in a harsh world, as one inspiration for *ReCore*. "In a similar way, I'm trying to illustrate the end of humanity," he says, cheerily.

Just what have the reds got against the blues?

Joule is one of the last humans on Earth.

UPPERS & DOWNERS

This month's temperature, taken

WHAT'S HOT?

1



XBOX GAME PREVIEW

Trying an unfinished game is the digital equivalent of licking the cake mix bowl before the sponge is out of the oven.

2



GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

Bolivian marching powder is no longer the country's most addictive export.

3



GEARS OF WAR: ULTIMATE EDITION

A week spent liquefying Locust in the brilliant beta and *Gears of War 4* suddenly seems brutally far away.

WHAT'S NOT?

1



ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

It'll take more than a grappling hook and nifty top hats to justify a trip to London.

2



THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

"You are the chosen one! And so is your friend. And his dad." Fantasy at its most insincere.

3



NO HALO 5 SPLIT-SCREEN

343 Industries' dedication to 60 frames per seconds is swell, but our couch will be a lonelier place for it.

TEN PRO TIPS

THIS MONTH:

HOW TO BUILD THE PERFECT RETRO COMPILATION

Art director Peter Hentze explains how Rare Replay will squeeze fans' nostalgia glands



1 Put every game front and center

What all Rare games have in common is this element of fun. They're exciting. Easy to approach. Vibrant. But it's also a very diverse selection. So what we wanted to do to draw everything together was give a feel that each game was being showcased, and that's how we came up with the theater theme.

2 Add fun flourishes

When you scroll through the games on the menu screen, you'll discover that every icon is animated and kind of has its own life. If you watch them long enough, you'll see things kick off. If you press the button, you'll go to the game's individual front-end, which is set out like a stage of the game, with loads of characters popping in and out.

3 Dig through the archives

When I say 'archives', you probably think of this vault buried under the ground beneath Rare, but it's not quite as glamorous. It's many, many cupboards and closets and stuff, where things are written to ROM and disc. We actually had to get extra guys to sift through all the

material and get all the source code of the games.

4 Unearth hidden treasures

It really was an education. We found old magazines, so we scanned images. We found art collections in binders. We even found books that had been bound years ago, and hardback books with classic art in them. That was really exciting, really interesting.

5 Modernize the art style

What's interesting about, say, *Battletoads*, is that since it was originally released there hasn't actually been that much new art. So we essentially just used the material we had to work from and put our own spin on it, kinda modernizing it and taking it forward in our own way.

6 Soften the controls

Our designers have looked at the control systems for certain games, such as *Jet Force Gemini*, and where possible they're going to try and make things more accessible. They've treated them all on an individual basis and done what they can to

BACKGROUND CHECK

NAME Peter Hentze

JOB TITLE Art director

BIO Peter has worked as an artist for Rare for over 15 years – his first title was *Mickey's Speedway USA* for the Nintendo 64. He cites *Conker: Live & Reloaded*, a 2005 remake of *Conker's Bad Fur Day* for the original Xbox, as his big break, working as a dedicated concept artist. He has also worked on a number of unreleased prototypes, which can be checked out in *Rare Replay's* theater, in a section voiced-over by Peter himself.

make sure the players don't get frustrated.

7 Add new twists

A big feature we have in the game is the snapshots. We have 80 of them, and they are basically bite-sized chunks of the games where we've made a challenge out of them. So for instance on *R.C. Pro-Am* you can play a challenge where you've got to do a race without allowing your speed to drop below 45mph. One of my favorites is based around *Battletoads* – it's an infinite Turbo Tunnel.

8 Be comprehensive...

Getting a game like *Knight Lore*, which was originally designed for the ZX Spectrum [a home computer released in 1982] up and running was quite a challenge for our engineers. I liken them to wizards, working in mystical ways to bring these obscure things back. Those guys have done a great job. I couldn't begin to tell you how they do it.

9 ...to a point

There were a couple of titles that we were really keen on getting in, like *Mickey's Speedway USA*, but we ran into licensing issues getting them into the project. For other games, it was tricky to track down the source code. But we still feel really positive and really proud of the games we have got into it. They are 30 of our finest games.

10 Future proof it

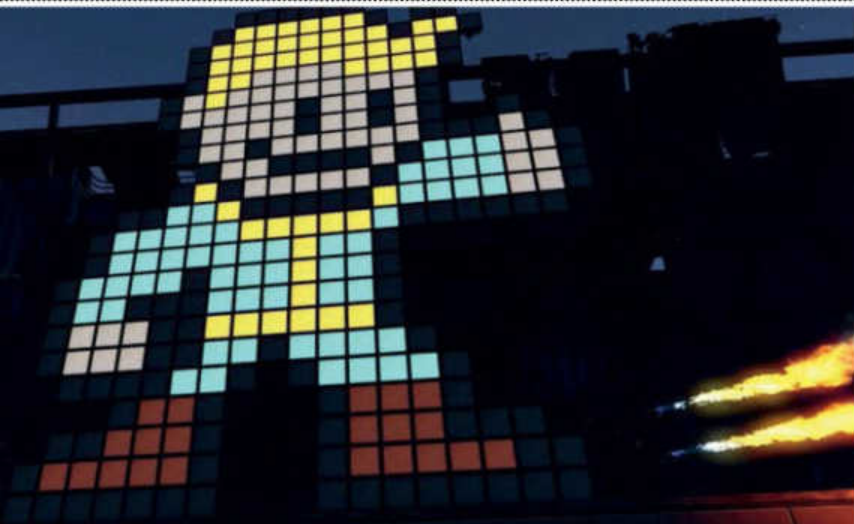
With all these new builds we have of the games, we're certainly going to keep them nicely archived. Having gone through all the challenges we have gone through to make this compilation, we're definitely going to be self-conscious about making sure that everything is properly stored and kept in an orderly fashion. **OXM**



Another day in Paradise?

Good news, DJ Atomika fans (fan?), Criterion is talking to Microsoft about making *Burnout Paradise* backwards compatible on Xbox One.

DASHBOARD



BUILDING A NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLD

Pete Hines on *Fallout 4*'s crafting system

Fallout 4 is now so close, we can practically taste it, which probably explains why our radiation poisoning levels are currently through the roof.

Speaking of the roof, (great segue incoming) that's just one part of the house you can construct with the game's ambitious crafting system. Bethesda's Pete Hines tells us more.

"For the larger building stuff it's not [stored] in your inventory, it's in the workbench that you're using in that area," explains Hines. "I deconstructed this and it's all stored over here and then when I go to build it's pulling from that inventory of stuff I have." So building will rely on what we find in construction areas. Looks like we

can put our fears of heaving drywall across the Wasteland to rest.

You can install electronics in your new home, but they'll require building generators. "It's common sense visual stuff," continues Hines. "If it doesn't connect to the generator, the power doesn't work." Luckily, he explains, crafting specific items has never been easier.

"You can actually flag stuff to say 'I'm looking for this stuff because I want to make this,'" which means when you're scavenging "anything that fulfils the requirement gets flagged in the world."

Your options also don't end with successfully switching on the power. "When you connect stuff to the computer terminal you have a lot of control and sort of fine tuning," says Pete. "If you've got something that plays music, you can actually define how it's playing the music," and different devices give you different options. "What color are they [the lights]? What is the pattern? Do they flash? When does the fire shoot out of the thing?" Hmm. It's probably best to test that last one outside first.

Lead producer Jeff Gardiner claims that he's "played the game for probably 400 hours, and I'm still finding stuff that I haven't

//400 HOURS, AND I'M STILL FINDING STUFF THAT I HAVEN'T SEEN//

seen." At this rate, by the time we've mastered all that crafting has to offer and explored all of *Fallout 4*, humanity actually *will* have been wiped out. At least the cockroaches will enjoy it.

YOU'RE FIRED! > QUOTES OF THE MONTH > BLAH BLAH > HE SAID WHAT? > YADDA

"I've wanted to tell people, 'Hold onto your 360 games!' There were a hundred times where people had to stop me from tweeting that."

Phil Spencer only just managed to keep backwards compatibility under wraps.

"It's completely optional. It's something that players can use if they're having trouble, but in general you can unlock everything."

MGS V community manager Robert Peeler, defending the game's microtransactions.

"I wouldn't do that necessarily with humans but when you're doing it with demons, the gloves are off"

DOOM executive producer, Marty Stratton, explaining why chainsawing people to death is fine, as long as they're not *technically* people.

DASHBOARD

ALL CHOKED UP

HITMAN: CHOOSE YOUR OWN MISADVENTURE

The most open-ended Hitman game yet proves that there's more than one way to skin a (fat) cat

Agent 47's first foray onto new-gen tech might be slim of name (just *Hitman* – no subtitles this time, thank you please), but it's fat with mischief. To demonstrate the wealth of murderous options available to everyone's favorite barcode-headed assassin, developer IO Interactive invited *OXM* to take a tour of one of the game's early stages, 'The Showstopper'.

This stage takes place during a fashion show party hosted in the grounds of a luxurious Parisian mansion, and we're told the explorable playing area is four times the size of anything we've seen in previous *Hitman* games. Agent 47 fancies that this swanky soiree will provide the perfect cover to allow him to get close to his targets – Viktor Novikov, outgoing owner of the Sanguine fashion house, and his partner-in-crime, retired supermodel Dahlia Margolis...

1 START

Unbeknown to the attendees, the fashion show is a front for Novikov and Margolis' other business interest – the couple are involved with a spy ring, and are attempting to sell national secrets to a mystery buyer on the top floor of the mansion. Agent 47 needs to reach them; but if he wants to bypass the hefty security, he's going to need a disguise...

WHICH COSTUME DO YOU GO FOR?

2 JANITOR

A great choice – it might not bag you a dance with the mayor's debutante daughter, but it *will* grant you a bag of tools. And, more importantly, it lets you poke around the back rooms unnoticed.

What do you do next?

2A TAMPER WITH THE GARDEN HEATER

Our targets love themselves a crafty cigarette. Puncture the garden heater with a screwdriver, and the escaping gas turns the smoking area into a death trap waiting to happen. All we need now is for Novikov to step outside and spark up...

3 WAITER

This dapper outfit not only guarantees you alone time with the canapés (worth seeing how many vol-au-vents you can fit in your waistcoat on the way out), but it also gives you a golden opportunity to tamper with the drinks.

But who are you serving?

3A NOVIKOV

Not hard to figure out then, is it? Squirt some poison in his Gatorade, or whatever it is rich people drink at parties, and scamper before anyone nearby can connect the dots.

4 SECURITY GUARD

The mansion is swarming with security guards, so isolating one and nicking his costume can be tricky. But if you manage to score one, you'll be rewarded with a disguise that gives you access to most areas of the mansion. It'll give you ample opportunities to get in close with Novikov, but you'll rarely be alone.

What to do?

4A BLOW THE WHOLE ROOM UP

Subtlety – who needs it? Just stick a bomb in the corner of a room or corridor, hide round the corner and when Novikov strolls past, light the blue touch paper. You can do this because the security guards are the only people who don't have to go through the metal detector checkpoints dotted throughout the building.

5 AU NATURAL

Nothing gets between an assassin and his cheap suit – not even the mission. Fortunately, even if Agent 47 doesn't fancy playing dress-up, there are still plenty of opportunities for murder.

Do you...

5A PLACE A BOMB ON THE CANAPÉS TABLE

Not as stupid as it looks (as long as no one sees). If a party-goer spots a suspicious object, she'll inform a security guard who will disarm it and take it inside to the evidence room. Meaning you can swoop in later and reclaim it, bypassing the metal detectors.



Lego: Combat Evolved

Halo 5's latest Warzone map, *Raid on Apex 7*, was unveiled in a novel way at this year's San Diego Comic-Con – in the form of a Mega Blox reconstruction, totalling over 89,500 bricks.

2B LOOSEN THE LOUDSPEAKER

The mansion is packed with objects that can be turned into comedy death traps with a little elbow grease. Such as the loudspeaker overhanging the mansion's balcony. Every character in the level has a routine that they run through like clockwork – including your targets. Learn Novikov's routine, predict when he's going to be underneath the speaker, and let it fly...

3B NOVIKOV'S COMPANY

It's hard to give a Russian oligarch the garotting he deserves when he's currently being interviewed by a journalist. Slip a laxative into her drink and she'll dart off to the restrooms in a panic, giving you some valuable alone time with Mr Novikov.

4B SET OFF FIREWORKS

If you can find the remote, you can set off the post-party fireworks early, creating a distraction. It's loud too, so if your timing is perfect you can even get away with putting a bullet in the target's head.

5B FETCH YOUR TRUSTY SNIPER RIFLE

Levels are built for replayability. After your first playthrough you can ask the Agency to drop off advanced weapons in key strategic locations. So you can plant a high-powered sniper rifle in the garden shed, for example. Now line up the shot and snuff out the suit.

6 THEY'RE DEAD!

Congrats, we guess. How do you make your escape?

6A THROUGH THE FRONT GATE?

Classy. Low key. We approve.

6B VIA THE VICTIM'S SPEEDBOAT?

Touche.

6C VIA THE VICTIM'S HELICOPTER, IN FULL VIEW OF EVERYONE?

How gauche.

HOW TO SPEAK DEVELOPER

Your guide to translating those interview gems

"We'd love to make our game one of the backwards compatible titles."

If you think you're playing that on your Xbox One without buying our Remastered Super Perfecto-Great Edition then you're as stupid as we are rich.

"Our dev plan was simple – we just made the game we'd want to play!"

Look out for *Corporate Cretin Simulator* this holiday season.

"With Twitter integration, you can use our unique hashtag to get even more fun out of our game!"

#innovationisdeadno
ideasleftthewellisdry
howdiditcometothis

"When you take on a new entry in a beloved franchise, it's important to give the fans what they want."

Thanks to them, we can practically copy and paste the last game and don't have to take the 'risk' of adding any new features.

DASHBOARD

INTERFACE THE MUSIC

EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

Recently played games stack up on the Home screen, with pinned games and Apps living beneath them. Recently played games include links to any screens and vids you've taken and updates (patches/DLC) from the developers.



//BACK OFF, SIRI:
THERE'S A NEW
DISEMBODIED FEMALE
ASSISTANT IN TOWN//

XBOX ONE GETS A (INTER)FACELIFT

Easier navigation, enhanced game recording and Cortana in your console: Xbox One finally gets an update we *want* to install

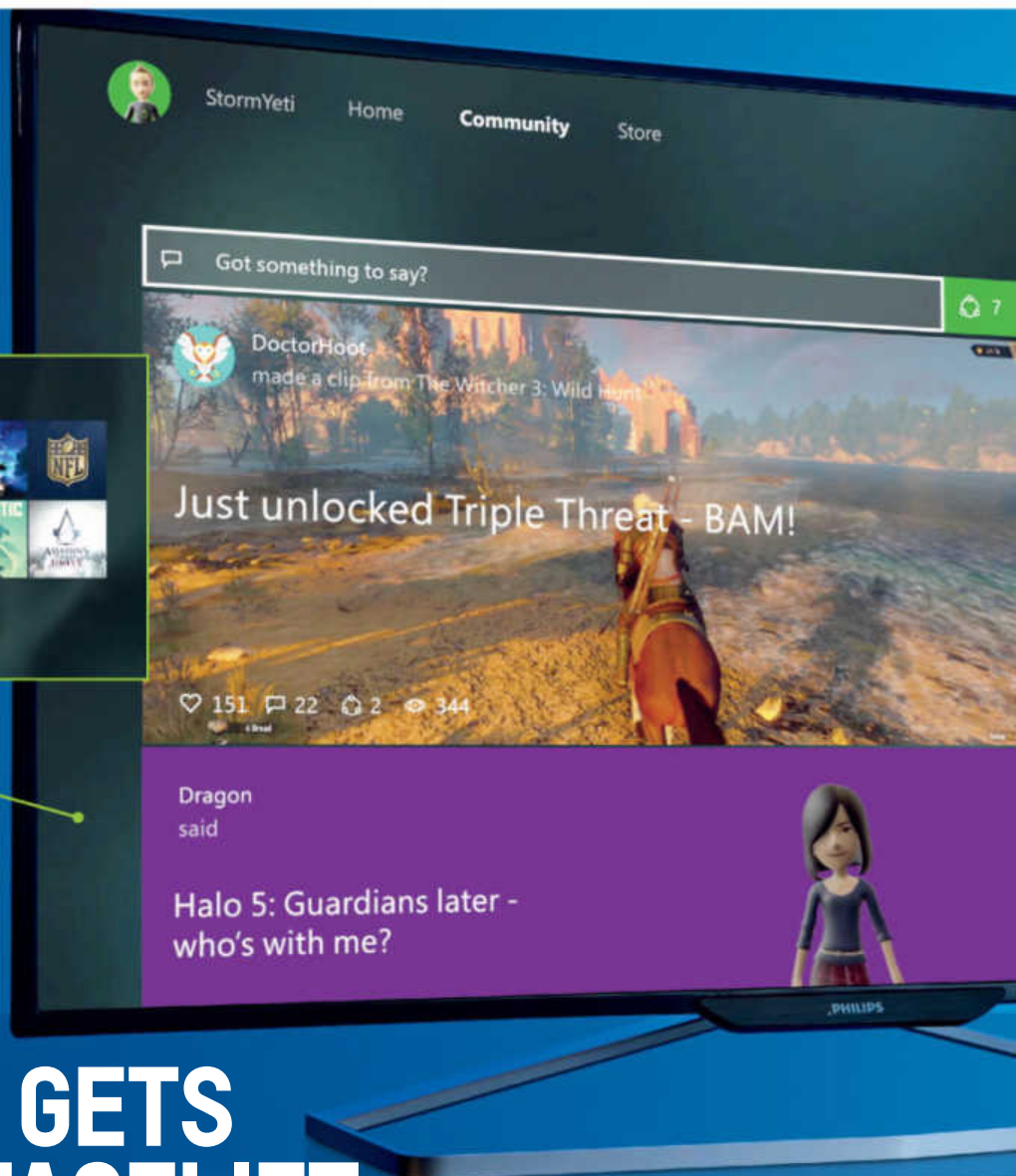
What's on Games with Gold this month? How do I delete that video of me playing *Farming Simulator* before I lose all my followers? Navigating Xbox One's current interface sometimes makes us want to

break down in tears, especially when we accidentally unpin our Fox News app. This fall sees the launch of a much improved and, crucially, faster interface. Cosmetically, it shares more in common with Windows 10's Xbox App, with an improved focus on working alongside your games.

In it, a double-tap of the Xbox button brings up a sidebar menu. This enables you to do almost everything – change your settings, see who's online or invite friends to a party. Options once buried in menus are now a couple of button-presses away. You don't even have to pause

your game, although that's probably unwise if you're in the middle of a deathmatch. That's where Cortana comes in.

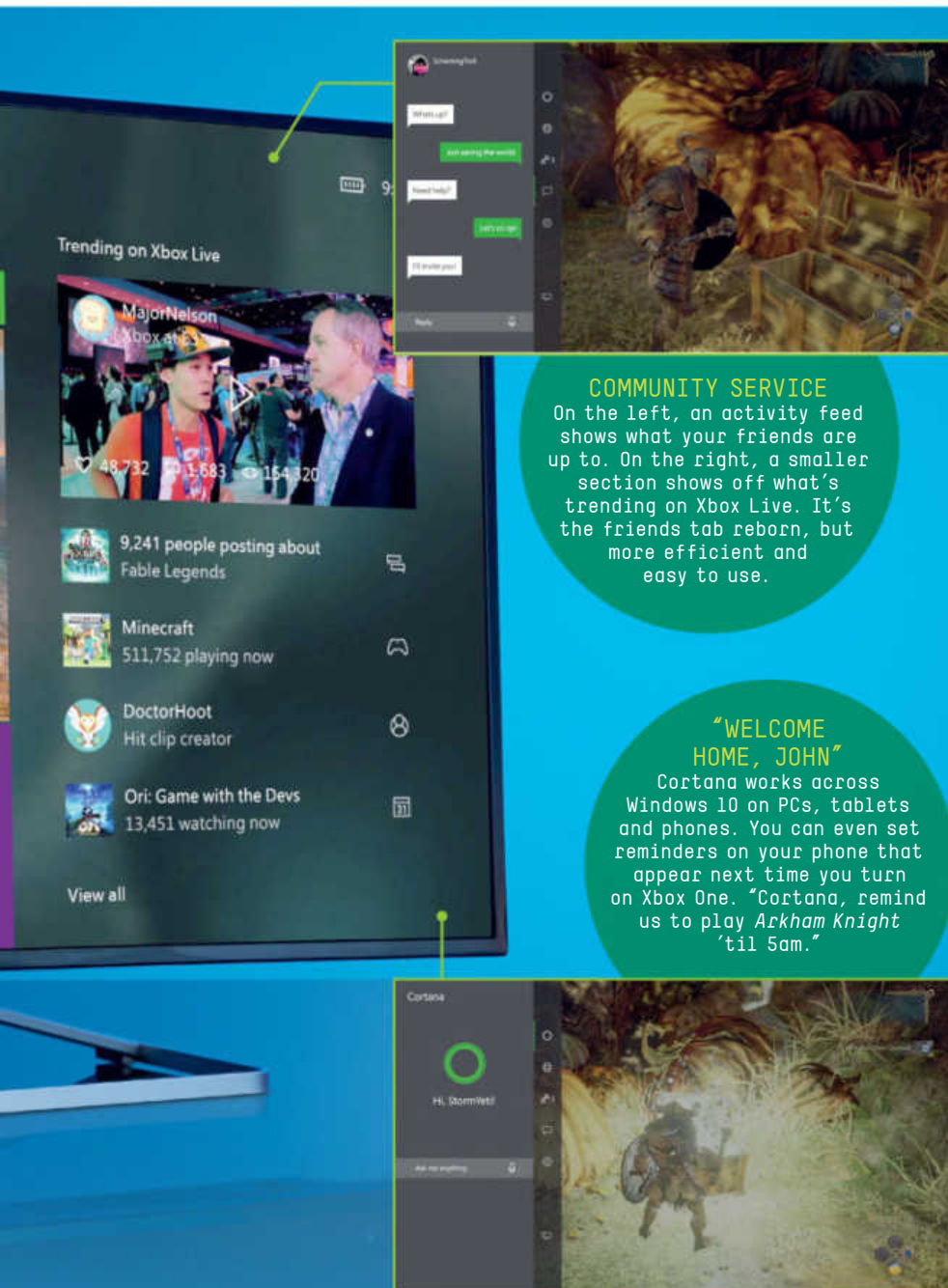
Back off, Siri: there's a new disembodied female assistant in town. Previously just a Windows 10 feature, Cortana makes ordering Xbox One about even





Xbox One gets more free games

Xbox Live users get more value for money, with Games with Gold now giving us two free Xbox One games a month. Including the pair of Xbox 360 titles, that's a free game per week. Madness.



COMMUNITY SERVICE

On the left, an activity feed shows what your friends are up to. On the right, a smaller section shows off what's trending on Xbox Live. It's the friends tab reborn, but more efficient and easy to use.

"WELCOME HOME, JOHN"

Cortana works across Windows 10 on PCs, tablets and phones. You can even set reminders on your phone that appear next time you turn on Xbox One. "Cortana, remind us to play *Arkham Knight* 'til 5am."

easier by doing away with menus altogether. You can ask Cortana which friends are online, have her invite them to your game and pull them right into *Forza* race or *Halo* battle, without you having to pause or leave the game once. 'Xbox, record that' is primitive

grunting compared to what Cortana is capable of. You can ask her to record a specific amount of gameplay footage, add a message to the video, then share it, all while you're still playing.

Xbox One has gone through some big changes over its first

two years, but every tweak brings it closer to perfection. This new interface addresses one of the consoles last glaring issues, and improves some of our favourite new-gen features. It's a sleek, smart change and we can't wait for its launch later this year.

Rumour & Speculation

The five biggest bits of gossip this month

1 A new *Hitman* mission has you taking out people who liked *Absolution*.

EXCITEMENT: 8/10

LIKELIHOOD: 3/10

2 *FFXV: Episode Duscae 3.0* will have a disc release, paid DLC, pre-order content and 652 microtransactions.

EXCITEMENT: 3/10

LIKELIHOOD: 7/10

3 *Shenmue 2.5: Pay Up, Fanboys* to be Xbox One exclusive.

EXCITEMENT: 4/10

LIKELIHOOD: 6/10

4 PETA claims making animals play *Toro* is crueller to them than actual bullfighting.

EXCITEMENT: 2/10

LIKELIHOOD: 9/10

5 One very lucky *OXM* reader got a Jar Jar Binks cover.

EXCITEMENT: 1/10

LIKELIHOOD: 10/10

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER EIDOS MONTREAL / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA 2016

DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

A terrorist attack starts off another globetrotting adventure

So Adam Jensen is a terrorist now?

Thankfully not. Adam actually starts out on a mission to detain the leader of the Augmented Rights Coalition (ARC), believed to be responsible for the attack. The ARC headquarters is full of branching pathways. Extras and different characters can be found depending on the route you take, the game rewarding you for going off the beaten path.

Hold up. If his game's so good, then why isn't Jensen smiling?

Don't think he knows how. Shame, because he's got some great new toys. Nanoblades can pin people to walls, but can also be detonated to take out guards. There's also a non-lethal Tesla gun, capable of knocking out four enemies at once. The most dubious 'non-lethal' move we've seen since we smashed all those people with the Batmobile.

Can't he also Icarus Dash? Bet he's not as fast as me.

Correct - he's much faster, with the Dash letting him move at impossible speeds and reach new areas. Adam's Icarus Strike lets him land with a shockwave, taking down anyone who thought standing around under a high ledge was a good idea. Then there's 'Focus mode' which slows down time to help you dodge fire and line up headshots.

Takedowns? Headshots? I thought this was a stealth game!

This time Eidos Montreal has tried to make the action mechanics just as interesting and deep as the stealth. Cover-based shooting looks tighter, and hopefully more augs will stop us from feeling guilty for not trying to ghost the game. It's been designed for players who don't want to opt for just stealth or just shooting, but a mixture of both.

But can't we all just get along?

Well, it is possible to talk your way out of trouble. Adam's conversation with ARC's leader can go in many different directions, depending not just on what you say, but how you've played thus far. Murder his people, and you'll have more trouble negotiating. A game where every decision you make matters. Cheer up, Adam; this could potentially be the best *Deus Ex* yet.

UPDATE



Second-screen experiences are so 2015. By 2029 we're about 25 screens at once.



Apparently, this *isn't* lethal. It'd finish us off - we've nearly died choking on air before.

UPDATE

Pretty sure that fangs beat knife. Sorry, buddy.

PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER DONTNOD ENTERTAINMENT / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA 2017

VAMPYR

Wish Assassin's Creed had less parkour and more bloodsucking?

Nice spelling, idiot.

That's actually the correct spelling. It's a new RPG from the maker of *Remember Me* and *Life is Strange* in which you play a vampire hiding in London, at the height of the Spanish 'Flu epidemic. Not the merriest setting for a game, but you should be fine. What kind of lame vampire gets the 'flu?

Playing a vampire? Sounds great! I particularly like how there's no catch!

Well, there is a tiny one. Vampires have to feed to stay alive, which means choosing your prey. You'll learn your victims' habits and hope they like walking down dark alleys alone. If our victims are as well-drawn as the characters in *Life is Strange*, this'll be heartbreaking.

No it won't be. You're a vamp - dream come true!

You're right! Sucking blood like a badass will also grant new abilities. Combat will be a range of melee attacks, shooting and supernatural powers. We're hoping for the ability to turn into a bat. But using your supernatural gifts drains energy, which means you'll have to feed during combat to survive.

Who'd be stupid enough to attack a vampire?

You're not the only supernatural creature on the block. Other species aren't fans and vampire hunters, oddly enough, don't like you much - they'll use tools and traps to hunt you down. We're not coming out of our coffin until it's released. In 2017. Oh.



This was our reaction, when we were told that the game isn't out until 2017.

UPDATES - NEW INFO ON THE BIG GAMES



We wanted a nice, smiley photo of the gang to send to their moms. Killjoys.

UPDATE

PUBLISHER NORDIC GAMES / DEVELOPER GUNFIRE GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA WINTER

DARKSIDERS II: DEATHINITIVE EDITION

Death comes to Xbox One (in a good way)

Revengeance called. It wants its 'dumbest subtitle' crown back.

It'll catch on. For the unfamiliar, this is an epic *Zelda*-esque action-adventure where you play as Death, along with trusty crow Dust and noble steed Despair. Dungeon diving is the order of the day, as you explore environments based on heaven and hell.

Sounds bleak, one to avoid then?

Darksiders II wasn't the most original game, but that didn't stop it being fun. It had some clever puzzle design and loads of inspired gadgets (if 'inspired' means 'nicked from other games'). It was also huge. This *Deathinitive Edition* also includes all of the DLC.

So they saved the merrier stuff for DLC?

Hardly. It includes *Death Rides*, *Angel of Death*, *Deadly Despair* and *Shadow of Death*. You can't accuse it of going off theme. In response to feedback, balancing tweaks have been made to difficulty and loot distribution. The moral? Send devs more hate mail.

Graphics any good?

Paint me a word-picture!

An improved engine was used to relight the whole game, so expect better ambience and shadows. Environments and characters have been tweaked and reworked to make a handsome game look even prettier, too. It'll run in 1080p now - so it's a noticeable upgrade.

I'll deathinitely be picking this one up.

Oh, good. It's catching on. This is a worthy update, but it needs to be to compete in a game-stuffed 2015. Sometimes when we get a new-gen port, it's because a sequel is on the way (as with *Dishonored*). No word of a sequel here - could *Deathinitive Edition* be testing the waters? Nearly 7,000 people voted for the Xbox 360 version to be backwards compatible, so this could be a sleeper hit. It's survived a studio rebirth (Gunfire formed from the remnants of original developer Vigil), a new console generation and even the bankruptcy of THQ, but then what else would you expect from a game starring Death himself?

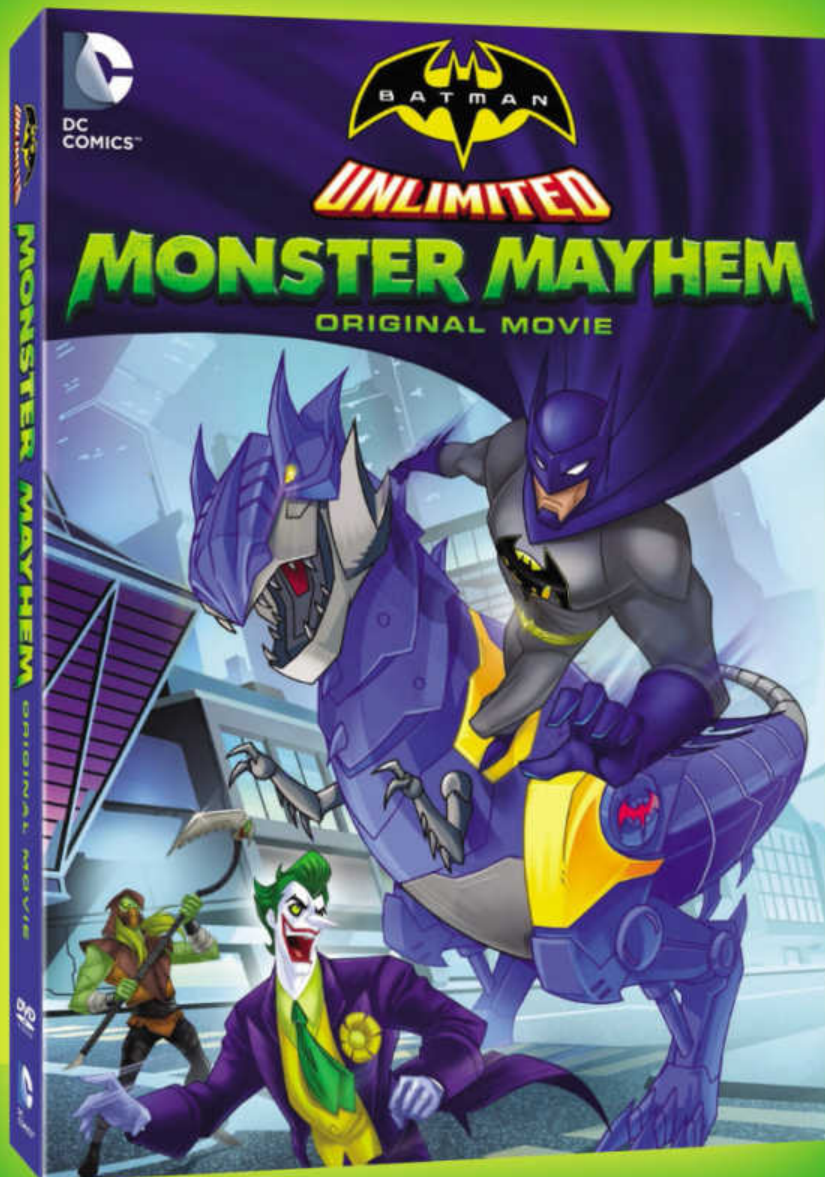


Nice to see the Iron Throne getting more work. Our favorite *Game of Thrones* character.



"Is that bone meant to be sticking out of our head?" - Common OXM office query.

NOW ON BLU-RAY™ COMBO PACK, DVD AND DIGITAL HD



It's Halloween in Gotham. To celebrate, the city's spookiest villains [Scarecrow, Clayface, Solomon Grundy and Silver Banshee] have all joined forces and gone on a crime spree. Batman swings into action to stop them, joined by Green Arrow, Cyborg, Nightwing and Red Robin.

BATMAN TM & © DC COMICS

Messages

Love letters, death threats, and some stuff about games... your comments on the mag and on Xbox

CONTACT US [f facebook.com/oxmonline](#) [t @oxm](#) [e oxm@futurenet.com](#) [w gamesradar.com/oxm](#)

We love hearing what you guys get up to every month, but when one of you tells us that the "best option available" to you was to put a baby in the oven, well... In other, less shocking, news we had a clear winner in our vote for a most-wanted Rockstar sequel...



Star Letter

Prize: The Elder Scrolls Online

The best piece of correspondence wins a game from Matthew's goody bag

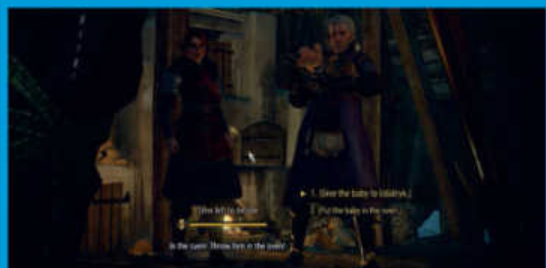


FRY BABY

I loved the 'worst thing you've done in *The Witcher 3*' part of your magazine [Issue 177]. Admittedly, burning 73 people to death is a pretty bad thing to do, but I couldn't help but think of (SPOILER ALERT) the side quest where I willfully decided to put a baby in the oven. I didn't know the outcome, but the baby turned out to be okay in the end. That was also the best option available to me. Very rarely are game developers brave enough to throw up moral choices like that, so fair play to CD Projekt RED for developing some of the most absorbing side quests around.

Craig Carroll

Well, what a wonderful insight that was into the kind of person who likes to read our magazine. Enjoy your prize, Craig. Thanks for the nightmares.



Prime target

So many people are getting excited for *ReCore*. I've even seen so-called 'gamers' calling it their game of the show! Uh, shouldn't there be some law that says you can only win game of the show if you show some actual game?

Amy Harrison

We're always wary of a game trailer that doesn't show any gameplay. But we think we can justify getting excited for *ReCore* mainly because of the talent behind it. Keiji Inafune, of *Mega Man* and *Mighty Number 9* fame, is working with Mark Pacini, who was the game director of the *Metroid Prime* trilogy – when he decides to make a new game, that's worth getting excited for.

Buy before you try

I hate to admit this, but I pre-ordered *Fallout 4*. Normally I don't pre-order games, from experiences that other players got from games like *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. I usually wait and see if the reviews are good, but Bethesda sold me so much I pre-ordered it the first chance I got. I was really convinced by what they said, and you can call me an idiot if you want, but I believe *Fallout 4* is in good hands.

Tyler Knowlton

We don't want to call you an idiot, Tyler, you did the logical thing. Pre-ordering can be a risk, and it's only really necessary if you want a disc copy of a big game on

day one (so *Fallout 4* makes sense). Also you'll get a free copy of *Fallout 3* to tide you over until November. Still, it's worth keeping in mind that we can download games at home now from day one, with no risk of it being sold out. The size of *Fallout 4* might wipe out our hard drive, mind...

Anti-social gaming

I'm sure I'm not the only older gamer who just didn't get into the social side of gaming. The concept of 'friends' who I've never met just feels alien to me. Although I've tried, I just can't get into multiplayer/co-op gaming and dislike listening to or watching some of the idiots online. The problem is that, more and more, I see a bigger focus on multiplayer, and games that I might otherwise have loved (*Evolve*?) don't appeal because they don't have single-player elements. Do you have any tips for older gamers that find the whole 'friends online' thing a strange concept?

Rob Woolley

You don't have to be old to prefer single-player, and games like *Arkham Knight* and *The Witcher 3* prove that people who want to be alone are still catered for. If you did want to try playing online again, games where you play as a team usually have a friendlier community – something like *Payday 2*. Better yet, get a real-life friend to join you online, then you won't feel as lonely when everyone's screaming 'noob!' down the headset at you. Which we hope doesn't happen, of course.

YOUR VOTE

WHICH NON-GTA ROCKSTAR SERIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE RETURN TO XBOX ONE?

RED DEAD

A clear winner - and not an unexpected one. Rockstar's depiction of the dying days of the Wild West was a visual feast on Xbox 360 - imagine how it would look on Xbox One.

BULLY

While *GTA* and *Red Dead* espoused freedom, *Bully* forced you into the regimented world of the schoolyard. We think the template has more life in it yet, and so do you.

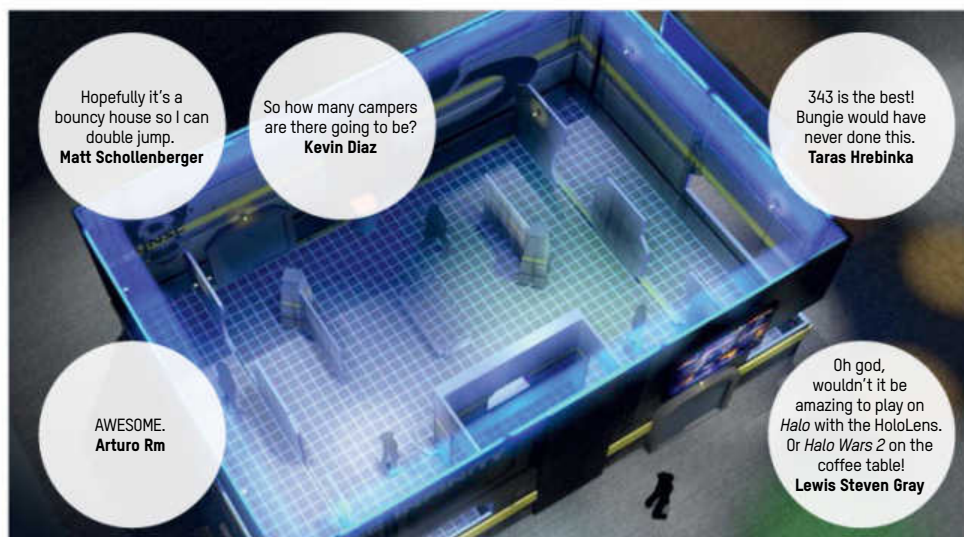
RED DEAD - 56%
BULLY - 16%
MANHUNT - 6%
MIDNIGHT CLUB - 7%
MAX PAYNE - 6%
LA NOIRE - 9%

MAX PAYNE

A surprisingly poor showing for Max - he's slumping it in joint last place. Perhaps *Max Payne* fans are still ploughing through the third game? That was a loooong one.

The Annotated... Halo 5 at Comic Con

Your response to 343 building a real-life Breakout arena for the show



Hot topic

How important is backwards compatibility to you?



It's important to me because I'm running out of space for all these consoles! Backwards compatibility means more gaming freedom on the Xbox One.

Elene Laidlein



So, so, important. I can't live without playing *Half-Life 2* and *BioShock*. I have to unplug my Xbox One every time and switch consoles. Backwards compatibility would be everything I need

Kendra Brainard



It ensures brand loyalty. I had a 360 and almost bought a PS4. Had you announced backwards compatibility earlier I wouldn't have even considered changing teams.

Dwight Smith



Backwards compatibility is very important. How are we to become invested on a console when we can't bring our games over from the previous one? I've bought so many XBLA and disc games that I hope will get transferred.

Kevin Johnathan Ruiz



Not important to me. I bought an Xbox One to play Xbox One games. But that's just me...

Nicole Ormes



It's not only important for people who supported the 360, but also for PlayStation or Nintendo fans who decide to try Xbox now. Backwards compatibility helps catch up on what they missed out on.

Steve Simpson



Not. I don't think you've shown what the Xbox One can actually do, the Xbox 360 should be a thing of the past already!

Dan Kirk

FEATURE



How DICE is returning Star Wars
Battlefront to gaming greatness

A NEW HOPE

A few minutes into playing *Battlefront* – well, seconds really – and it's no surprise just how *Star Wars*-y it is. It drips with authenticity, from the blaster noises and intercom chatter to the slightly stop-motion feel of the AT-ST animation and bad acting deaths of the Stormtroopers (seriously, waving arms everywhere). What is surprising is that it doesn't feel like a straight *Battlefield* remake, the shooter DICE is better-known for. The gunplay is faster and more immediate; the character setup and loadout system are breezy and light compared to *Battlefield*'s arguably dry menu-fest. There are *power-ups*.

"We didn't really feel like just creating a skin on *Battlefield* was the way to do *Star Wars* justice," senior producer Sigurlína Ingvarsdóttir explains. "It was important for us to reboot *Battlefront* and to create something unique – to fit the franchise." And to our hands it does feel, if not unique (it's a shooter, after all), very different to what you might expect. It's speedy and lighter on its feet, with far more of a focus on rapid-fire, from-the-hip blasting and... *fun*. This isn't a po-faced army take on Lucas' galaxy far, far away. There's nothing stern or frowny here – when Admiral Ackbar shouts orders at you on-screen, he's not a replacement for a cigar-chomping, ass-kicking general type: *he's Admiral Ackbar*. His face wobbles a bit because DICE has made him move like a puppet, not an actual living creature. You can't help but smile and mutter, "It's a trap."

My first big battle is the Walker Assault mode. It's essentially the start of *The Empire Strikes Back*, as the Rebels fight to hold off an Imperial assault from huge stomping AT-ATs. There's an asymmetrical setup here, with Team Rebel having to activate several relays in order to call in a Y-Wing bomber run as Team Vader close in. Without that the AT-ATs are invulnerable, stomping ever closer to destroying the Rebel base. Once the bombers come in, though, the walkers are weakened, shifting the focus to trying to damage them in any way possible. From throwing every weapon and ship the Rebels have to hand at them, to obviously including the iconic leg-looping harpoon Speeder run from the film. »

Writer: Leon Hurley



FEATURE



As all this is happening, the action and presentation is so on point it makes other licensed games seem like they didn't bother. The blasters feel and sound perfect, while their impacts pop and spark like movie effects. Hurtling around the snow as laser bolts light up the air is far more about capturing that movie magic than military procedure. As we trade fire and fight for ground between the trenches, TIE Fighters and X-Wings scream overhead and AT-STs' owl-like faces appear around corners. Instead of ticking off obvious movie references, it's like the very substance of the films permeates the game's bones.

Through the chaos, guns and occasional TIE Fighter faceplant into a mountain, DICE's skill with shooters shines through. "What are the hallmarks of a DICE shooter?" asks

Use the Force, Lu... Oh, you already are. Never mind - as you were.

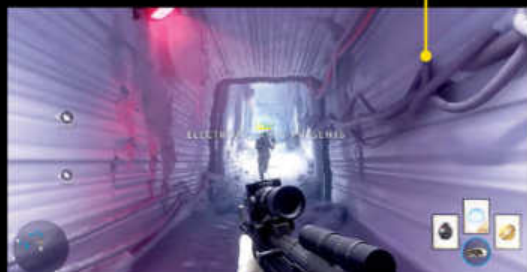
The Frostbite engine's '80s sci-fi cobbling render is top notch.

Ingvarsdottir. "Epic scale and great vehicular combat. That's a part of our DNA and that's obviously something so applicable to *Star Wars* as a franchise." And it's been applied beautifully here: the guns have an impact and violence when you pull the trigger - more so even than in the films, but necessary to create a satisfying sense of feedback when you take a shot. Jumping into a fighter, or taking the gunner's seat in the AT-AT gives you a bird's-eye view of the battle, as well, to really take in the staggering size of it all.

It's fast, too. You're constantly 'in' the action, with movement, power-ups and vehicles keeping everything immediate. Even respawning never takes you too far from the frontline. "Yeah, we wanted it to be very 'pick up and play, get into the action fast,'" says Ingvarsdottir. "We thought about

that a lot in the way that we're doing our spawn-point design to have a quicker experience." One of the other things that literally propels the game's speed is the excellent jetpack. It's got plenty of forward momentum, firing a burst that flings the player into the fight or over a ledge. It's such a joy to use that there are basically two states in any given battle: using the jetpack, and watching the cooldown until you can spark it up again.

That brings us on nicely to the slightly unusual weapon/power-up system in the game. The jetpack is one of the Star Cards you can equip to shape your character, which are activated by either the bumpers or Y. There are no classes here, not even a default secondary weapon. Everything you bring to the battlefield is defined by the cards you unlock and equip,





including things such as multi-shot 'Barrage' grenade launchers, RPGs and other weapon enhancements, through to that brilliant jetpack.

On the cards

"You have three cards," explains Ingvarsdottir. "So we don't have classes, but as you progress in the game you are able to unlock more and more of these cards. Your shields, your grenades, your jetpacks – all of these are cards, and you combine them into what you feel is a good kit for you going into battle. That's how you basically create the loadout that goes with how you like to play the game." These Star Cards are then essentially combined into various 'hands', a range of three pre-selected options that define your character. You can have multiple hands, switching between them as your battle needs change.

You can also share these hands with your partner, *Battlefront's* two-man replacement for squads. "You have pre-selected hands that you bring into battle [and] your partner can share your hand," says Ingvarsdottir. "That becomes a very interesting dynamic in two situations: one, when you're both up to speed and kit yourselves out to complement each other [as] a really cool unit. Or, if you are bringing a friend into the game [who] hasn't played before, then you are able to give them a taste of the game by sharing unlocks that you have." You'll also never lose your partner thanks to an ever-visible

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT



Not only can you fly Snowspeeders into battle, but you get to lasso AT-AT legs.

You can't actually drive the AT-ATs, but you can call in map-flattening orbital strikes.



"IT'S MORE MOVIE MAGIC THAN MILITARY PROCEDURE"

TALES FROM THE BATTLEFRONT

My favorite memory from a 20-minute session of Survival mode on Tatooine involved an AT-ST, an Ion rocket and various cries of "woah!". Myself and my co-op buddy had just defeated five waves of Stormtroopers, who were swarming to our position in Imperial Shuttles and drop pods. They were making a valiant attempt to kill us after we'd been marooned from the space battle raging high above our heads. So far, so fist-pumpingly good.

But this is when we suddenly heard the unmistakable mechanical whirs and clacks of a dreaded Chicken Walker searching for us among the pillars of rock. Ah.

Unlike in previous *Star Wars* games, such as *The Force Unleashed* or *The Clone Wars* – where these enemies were a poultry joke – here they feel dangerous. Since said AT-ST is able to kill us with just a few laser blasts, my partner and I chose to split up. He bravely ran between its legs, while I jetpacked to a vantage point in cowardly fashion and readied my rocket.

Just as it swung to target me, I fired. THWOOMP-SWOOSH! The explosion was incredible. DICE gives it that familiar *Battlefield* bass but with the added rush of the fact you're taking down an iconic sci-fi baddie. With everything in *Battlefront* more grounded – and you more vulnerable – it gives these encounters extra dramatic impact. Admiral Ackbar congratulating us on audio comms is a nice touch.

Ben Griffin



FEATURE

LUKE WHO'S HERE

THE FORCE WILL BE WITH YOU

We've seen a lot of the Dark Side, so what happens when Luke Skywalker enters the field? A power-up lands you 100 seconds with the Jedi Master, and he's as overpowered as you'd expect. Standard players will have to use the jetpack to have any hope of matching the heights of Skywalker's normal jump. He's formidable in combat, too, a standard infantry character will be history after just a couple of his 'normal' attacks.

But with just a minute and a half of Skywalker's company, who has time for mere normal hits? Brutal heavy attacks slaughter enemies up close, or he can just use Force Push and watch foes scatter across the battlefield. Impressive as it is, it's all filler compared to Saber Rush, which leaves nobody safe from his lightsaber strikes - anyone smart enough to try and escape is just a hop, sprint and slash from being another digit on his kill count. Skywalker's not invincible, but you'll certainly feel that way.

"AT-AT GUNS LAY DOWN WHOMPING CANNON BLASTS"

TALES FROM THE BATTLEFRONT

What *Battlefront* has over previous installments is how much the rhythm of the action feels like a proper *Star Wars* battle, rather than a madcap sandbox of random stuff. The action takes place in a giant snowy landscape peppered with trenches in front of Echo Base's hangar. As a Stormtrooper who seemed to keep missing the opportunity to play in an AT-AT or TIE Fighter, I spent the first half of my E3 demo taking advantage of people who thought they were safely hiding, dropping in behind them, firing a spread of laser shots then running away. Probably the

only opportunity I'd ever have to finish in the top half of the table - aided by the fact that most of my enemies didn't seem to know how the controls worked.

I was a sneaky Stormtrooper who played dirty, which seems befitting of the Empire to me. As the focus of battle moved to the hangar, I camped just to left of it and killed ten or so Rebels as they ran out before being charging in and admiring the location details inside; if only I could go off-brand and steal the Snowspeeder within. I may not have got to play the hero, but taking advantage of people who don't understand shooter controls is basically the same thing.

Samuel Roberts

AT-ATs are invulnerable unless the Rebels call in a bombing run.

outline, and you can spawn on each other at all times to stay in the fight.

So, for example, you could chose a heavily offensive setup with a Smart Rocket (high damage but slow to lock), the Barrage grenade launcher and Ion Shot (temporarily boosting your main weapon's damage against vehicles), leaving shields to your partner, who can also pack the faster dumb-firing Ion Torpedo for cover fire. That's a pretty deadly AT-ST-destroying unit combination right there.

Stuff like that comes in extremely useful during another mode we get to try, called Missions. This is effectively a set of single-player or co-op challenge maps. In this case, two downed Rebel pilots fighting off waves of Imperial troops while waiting for rescue on Tatooine. As well as a





range of Stormtrooper types – basic grunts, more advanced jetpack troops and snipers – there are also plenty of AT-STs every couple of waves.

Tat's entertainment

Like the multiplayer, it's brilliant, chaotic fun that even swapping in AI for other people can't really diminish. It also proves that the great looks of the Hoth level weren't a fluke. The sun-baked dust of the desert planet is far less forgiving than snow, and even under such a harsh sky it all looks beautiful, from the Stormtroopers' worn armor to the craggy environments and movie-aping special effects. It's edging into territory where, if we hadn't held the controller in our own hands, we'd be tempted to doubt the footage.

But there is one thing we haven't covered yet, and that's the potentially controversial power-ups. This almost retro touch is how you access certain weapons and abilities, as well as all of the weapons and hero characters. Unlike in *Battlefield*, you can't just run from your spawn point and jump into a waiting X-Wing. Instead, you have to collect the appropriate power-up and then activate it by tapping both bumpers at once. "The power-ups are basically what you pick up in the level," clarifies Ingvarsdottir. "So they might be an especially powerful weapon, or a hero token, which would then spawn you as a villain or hero, depending on which faction you are playing."

As in the rest of the game, there's an immediacy here – you can only have one power-up stored up, which

Like special weapons and vehicles, the hero characters are accessed by collecting pick-ups on the battlefield.

Luke's primary weapon is his lightsaber but he also has ranged attacks.

promotes faster fire-and-forget usage over hoarding. Power-ups dot the landscape pretty frequently, too, so they're far from being in short supply – although the more powerful ones are limited. While Smart Rockets and Barrage are two-a-penny, taking control of the AT-AT's guns or a ship is limited by the number of slots available. According to Ingvarsdottir, how these options appear in-game "depends on the rules of the mode [with] certain types of spawn and certain conditions". Some of it is random, while "heroes spawn in certain locations at a certain time".

We never found a hero power-up in our playthroughs, or even saw one in action, but we did get to commandeer an AT-AT. You don't pilot these in the traditional sense – they follow a set path, progressing inexorably towards the Rebel base – but you can take control of the guns, turning the head slowly to lay down heavy, whomping cannon blasts, or target orbital strikes on the tiny troops below. Compared to the rapid, scattering gunplay of the ground troops, these behemoths provide an entirely different flavor, towering over the fight and potentially turning the tide of battle. If the Rebels on the ground are battling the Imperials for a relay, then a well-placed orbital strike can make all the difference.

Another facet of the action, throwing yet more into the mix, are the ships. Again controlled by power-ups, when one is activated your character goes down on one knee with a finger to his ear in a pose that says, "I don't care if this is war, I'm taking this call". The screen fades and you're transported to the cockpit of, say, a TIE Fighter screaming over the map. It's immediately an iconic moment, from the almost painful sounds of the engines to guns firing while watching the distinctive back end of an X-Wing bob and weave under your sights.

Overall, after a few hours playing certain things really stand out. Firstly, the attention to detail is astonishingly high. The team at DICE worked



FEATURE

closely with LucasArts and Disney – specifically the production and story groups – to ensure that all the elements of *Star Wars* were dealt with correctly. “They have a set direction for how things work and how things are,” Ingvarsdottir tells us. “We work pretty closely with them so they tell us, ‘This works this way; this works that way. We can tweak this; this we can’t change. They have some very specific opinions about how things need to work and how they are in order to be consistent with the logic of the *Star Wars* universe.’” An example here being the fact that you can’t shoot through your own shields, something that might make sense from a gameplay perspective but doesn’t happen in the original movie universe.

There has to be wiggle room, however, as Ingvarsdottir points out: “Of course, games are not movies. Things that are obvious from a movie perspective don’t necessarily work in a game. If it isn’t fun as a weapon, or as a hero, or as a vehicle then nobody benefits. [LucasArts] understands that and there aren’t many cases of something that we really wanted to do that didn’t make it.”

Bending the rules

Of course, cinematic accuracy can cause a few problems. “There are no Rebel Walkers, as an example” highlights Ingvarsdottir. “The Imperials have the Walkers and there is no counterpart,” she continues. “That poses a very interesting [situation that demands] balancing. The conditions are so different between the Rebels and the Empire.” It’s something the game has turned to its advantage. “The Walkers become the objective, a moving objective because we have to design very asymmetrically. It’s interesting because it creates a very unique game mode.”

The other thing that we really took away from our hands-on is that *Battlefront* is both a strong shooter and slightly different from the established template. The former’s helped by the

TALES FROM THE BATTLEFRONT

Even for someone like me, a man with no particular love for those silly George Lucas films, *Battlefront* proves rousing. Don’t get me wrong, I might not get het up over Wookiees, Ewoks or uncomfortable-looking metal bikinis, but there’s something about the sound of a ‘70s-era blaster that manages to thaw even my apathetic heart. And while I may not have the films on Blu-ray, playing *Battlefront* conjures up potent memories of those epoch-making first moments with *Dark Forces*, *Rebel Assault* or even *Rogue Squadron*.

DICE’s take on Hoth’s snowy wasteland is an evocative portrayal, and stepping out into the as-yet-unbloodied powder under the shadow of an AT-AT, hot plasma beams washing the landscape in vibrant pinks and greens, is overwhelmingly exciting. Things get even better when I find the floating token that gives me control of my own AT-ST – each clanking step matched with a long-range artillery pummeling of the weak-minded Rebel forces or the puncturing of another white-hot hole in a Snowspeeder’s flimsy fuselage. For the time I have the driver’s seat I feel invincible, and I let the Dark Side wash over me entirely.

Ben Maxwell

In one mode you fight off waves of Stormtroopers.



“IT’S BOTH A STRONG SHOOTER AND SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT”

AT-STs are more vulnerable than AT-ATs, and can be easily taken down with blaster fire and rockets. Never hurts to call in an X-Wing, though.



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT



powerful-feeling guns and rapidly cycling action, while the latter comes from the different ideas such as power-ups and the hip-fire focus of the action (the game doesn't have iron sights, per se, but scoped weapons can be zoomed). There's no way you could ever mistake it for anything less than a triple-A shooter, but the texture's just varied enough to create a slightly different feel.

There are a few concessions to expectations, though. Things such as an 'active cooldown' replacing such un-sci-fi concepts as 'reloading'. "We have blaster-based weapons [that] don't have bullets, so you don't need to reload," admits Ingvarsdottir, "but we have a cooldown/overheat mechanic where you play a mini-game to counteract the overheat if you're shooting at a very rapid rate."

That reloading/cooldown mechanic aside, the tweaks to the expected FPS mechanics are subtle but do a surprising amount to distance the experience from the obvious touchpoint of *Battlefield*. That shouldn't pass by without praise: DICE could have easily kicked the *Battlefield 4* cast out the door dressed as Stormtroopers, changed a few mode names and called it a day, but it hasn't.

"For people outside of DICE, it's an obvious point of reference," understates Ingvarsdottir, "because that's what they know about us. Even for DICE itself, *Battlefield*'s an obvious point of reference." But Ingvarsdottir makes it clear that "there was never a sort of 'We're not going to make *Battlefield*' [vibe]. It was more, 'we're going to make it what we want it to be.'"

It's certainly a plan that's paid off, because after all our time playing, *Battlefront* feels like a *Star Wars* game that was crafted with love, rather than dollar signs in the eyes. In terms of fan impact, it's right up there with the upcoming JJ Abrams film, *The Force Awakens*. Even if you don't like the movies, months ahead of its November 17 release, it already feels like a contender for shooter of the year. ■



TALES FROM THE BATTLEFRONT

"Come play in the snow!" they say. "Unprintable words in a family magazine," I respond. My hatred of the white sludge isn't just limited to the real world, either. Ice levels in videogames are a huge red flag for me - too often they're a miserable excuse for developers to make the controls more slippery. So I was more surprised than anyone when I fell for DICE's recreation of Hoth (not just an ice level, but an entire ice planet). Considering the last time I explored Hoth in a game was

in *Lego Star Wars*, I was expecting a step up. I wasn't prepared for a Rebel's-eye view of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Over-reliance on hiding places has turned me off a lot of multiplayer shooters, so Hoth's wide-open snowscapes are exactly what I've been looking for. Good luck sneaking off when you're leaving a trail of footprints wherever you go. It's a multiplayer deathmatch where I felt I might feasibly see all 40 players (I certainly got killed by a fair number of them), especially when I tried the giddy highs of the jetpack jump. Forget shivering outside: this is where I'm spending all my winters from now on.

Paul Randall



PREVIEW

Two years on from the sad loss of Clancy himself, his name continues to power on – like Walt Disney with a BIG GUN.



PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT PARIS / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands

Ghost Recon gets an attitude - and an altitude - adjustment in the biggest, wildest Clancy game yet

There are two schools of thought on *Wildlands*. One says it's a brash *GTA* wannabe that betrays *Ghost Recon*'s grounding in team-based tactical warfare.

The other side argues it's a much-needed modernization of a flagging series; one that transplants the action into an exotic, reactive open world, where stealthy stake-outs are still on the menu, but players have the agency to blaze a louder trail to their objective.

It's important, then, we make clear which side of that divide we fall on, because while we loved what we saw behind closed doors at E3, *Wildlands* is

going to upset as many hardened Tom Clancy fans as it captivates. And, sorry traditionalists, but we fall firmly on the side of the debate that allows us to commandeer a drug baron's car, escape a high-octane chase by rocketing off a piece of corrugated iron jutting out from a canyon edge, and then nail a perfect landing on a salt plain below, where we can extract our gung-ho asses to the next mission by chopper. Yeaah! So ask yourselves before we begin: are you in or out?

Divisive *Wildlands* might prove to be, but the view from a helicopter is majestic enough to hush the most vocal of critics. The open world environment, we're told as we thunder over peaks and troughs, is the largest in any Ubisoft game to date - a vast,

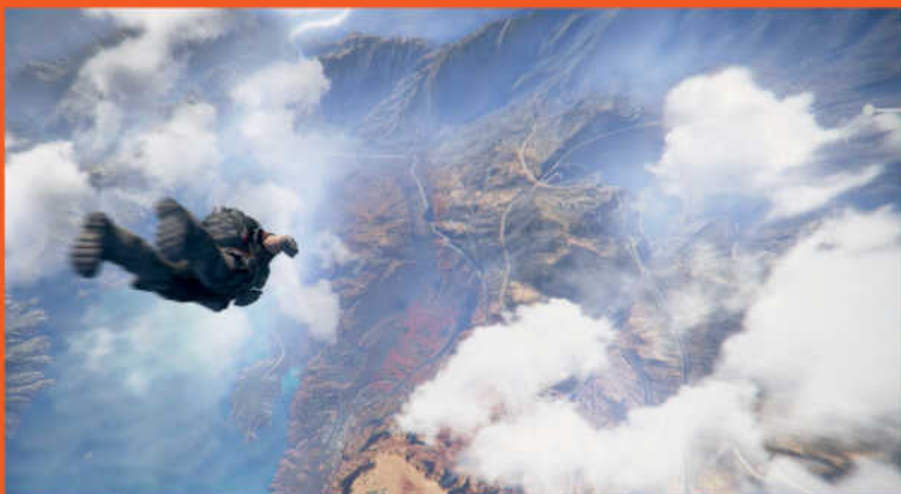
Bluffer's Guide

Ubisoft continues to tinker with the tactical military shooter series, which in its traditional state is maybe too slow for kids today. Now it's an open-world blastfest set in Bolivia.





Bolivia's landscape contains pockets of rainforest, the thick canopies providing ample cover for sneaking.



If the Bolivian mountains aren't quite high-altitude enough for you, you can go even higher. Everywhere you see, you can explore.

Offroad vehicles are your best bet if you plan to explore the wildlands - outside of the salt flats, you can expect a rocky ride wherever you go.



This is what's known as a plan going awry. Fortunately, there's always a chance to formulate a plan B, C, D or Z.



» rugged playground that stretches across the Andes in Bolivia. Usually the trend for open-world games such as this is to show us how 'teeming with life' they are, but *Wildlands* is different by design – the endless, maddening desertscape is punctuated only by tiny pockets of life and color that flourish in the areas where the mountains peter out, where the ground is arable enough to allow villages to spring up from the dust. It's an arid world, but one fertile with opportunities to raise hell.

With our head in the clouds, these villages appear as mere specks in the landscape, but we can see that there are over a hundred, each packed with objectives that players can tackle in any order they desire (or so it would appear). The player in the chopper decides to inspect one at ground level (via base jumping, because apparently *Wildlands* is happy to invite *Just Cause 3* comparisons) and up close, we learn that these settlements are typical South American riots of bustle. While some are naturally sleepier than others, there's usually something kicking off that draws your senses as you explore on foot.

Put the hurt in Huertas

In the rustic village on our screen, the entire community had spilled out onto the streets to explore a farmer's market. Our eyes dart to one of the other screens in the room – in all, the four players are co-habiting the game world, but are spread miles apart, left to their own devices. In one, we see a town enthralled by a local concert. On another screen, less harmonious scenes play out, as members of a drug cartel rough up some locals and hold them hostage. They're why you're here in the first place – Bolivia, in *Wildlands*' fiction at least, is the world's biggest cocaine producer, and the Santa Blanca gang are the country's de facto rulers. By completing missions, you weaken the ties between the cartel and the corrupt government, and strangle the supply line that's piping cocaine to the world. Tantalizingly, it seems you can do bad as well as good – we later witnessed a massacre that, we were told, was a direct consequence of a mission that had been completed earlier.

Back on our screen we launch into a mission, and all four players converge on a small mining town called Huertas, on a job to track down a high-ranking smuggler named Luis 'El Chango' Alvarez – who is willing to sell intel on his boss. His snitching nature hasn't exactly gone unnoticed however, which is why he currently finds himself locked in a cage. It takes a while for all four to arrive – early birds set up



PREVIEW

// *Wildlands* is different by design – it's an arid world, but one fertile with opportunities to raise hell //

It's wise to properly scout a town's layout before wading in, all guns a-blasting.

vantage points in the hills, waiting for stragglers to arrive fashionably late.

Missions are unscripted and players begin each one wherever and however they like. And within this footloose structure, the lopsided composition of *Wildlands*' open world of crowded urban areas surrounded by huge expanses of nothingness suddenly makes sense. The cleanest way to take out the guards surrounding El Chango's prison is to snipe from afar – the mountain ranges overlooking the town are an embarrassment of camping riches.

But then, things get messy if you have to swoop in and collect something after raising the alarm, and besides, this approach also denies you the chance to squeeze valuable intel from footsoldiers on the ground. Sam

Fisher-style. Here's where a little local knowledge comes into play – how heavily guarded is the city (in Huertas' case, very), and what distractions can you use to ghost unseen to your target?

Once we spring El Chango from his cage, we're grateful to be only a minute's drive from the wilderness. After springing El Chango's head against a drug baron car's hood to ensure his continued co-operation, we steal the ride and burn off towards the edge of a canyon, with half of Santa Blanca in pursuit. Things look bleak until we spy a piece of corrugated iron glistening in the distance. We change direction, and... well, you already know the rest. So, that's how it works. Only one question remains: are you in or out?

Alex Dale

ETA
2016

Metadata

FIX THIS...



The game is built for co-op. Much of the challenge lies in successfully communicating and executing a plan across your team. Will it be equally engaging to complete the missions all on your lonesome?



Open all hours

There's a time and a place for everything. If by 'everything' you mean 'counterterrorism'

This mock-up of Bolivia runs on a day/night cycle, and also features a dynamic weather system. If you choose to strike during daytime it'll be easier to tag enemy patrols, but at the expense of nighttime cover. While *Wildlands* is set in the modern day, one hangover from *Future Soldier* remains – deployable air drones.

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO GAMES / DEVELOPER FROM SOFTWARE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Dark Souls III

The legendary Hidetaka Miyazaki is back on Xbox. Prepare to die

Bluffer's Guide

Come on, you can't bluff your way through *Dark Souls*: pretenders need not apply. But if you have to ask, it's a third-person action game with a predilection for extreme player death.

You have to feel for Hidetaka Miyazaki. Here is a director of games renowned for the way they go against the industry grain – punishingly difficult

at a time when so many games are sprints to the finishing line, aloof and mysterious in an era of needy handholding, complex and focused in an era of sprawling open worlds.

Yet when *DSIII* launches early next year it will be the fifth From game of its type, and Miyazaki's fourth, in seven years. What was once celebrated for its unique otherness is beginning to feel like a template, and there are times in our demo when we get the impression Miyazaki would rather be somewhere else. When asked what he'd like to do next, he speaks of From's experience in

other fields, but here he is, introducing yet another medieval low-fantasy sort-of-roguelike, and we need only lay eyes on the game for a few seconds to know exactly what it is...

Still, this may be the fifth game in this loosely connected series, but it will be only the third on Xbox, and Miyazaki held only a supervisory role in development of *DSII*. In that context, what we see feels like a true generational leap, even compared to 1080p *DSII*: *Scholar of the First Sin*. That crumbling medieval stonework has never looked so good, its pathways and rooftops littered with scenery, and strewn with hollowed undead praying mournfully to a faded sun. Weapons and armor glisten in the sunlight; fabric sways in the breeze thanks to striking cloth physics. The area in which our demo is set, Wall Of Lodeleth, might be familiar, but it has never looked so good.

The actual mechanics of play are more familiar still, though as in any long-running series it's the little changes that count. The big one this time is the Ready Stance, which sees our hero raise the sword's hilt two-handed to eye level, the blade pointing straight out in front, and gives rise to a new range of weapon-specific attacks. With a longsword it's a lunging strike

that instantly breaks an opponent's guard; with a greatsword it's an upward slash that sends even a burly knight up into the air, then smashes them back down for huge damage.

It's not all about damage, either. It's about style, too: when we find and equip a scimitar, there are two of them, and they're being dual-wielded, the Ready Stance move a multi-hit spinning attack that clears a room of weedy undead in one go. As well as having more attacking options,

the protagonist is nimbler now, dashing and rolling at speed to evade attacks.

As pleasing as it all is to see, with it comes a certain trepidation. Miyazaki isn't

the sort of kindly gent to give us something new without asking for something in return: all these new options give him the excuse to ramp up the difficulty further than ever.

While we suspect we'll be cursing his name next spring after we fall to a boss for the umpteenth time, it is Miyazaki's involvement that makes *Dark Souls III* such an exciting prospect. The last outing was one of the best games of 2014, but it was not without its missteps, its world an incoherent sprawl, its enemy placements cheap, its healing and fast-travel systems ill-advised. Getting information out of Miyazaki on how such elements will be treated is like getting blood out of a stone – or blood out of Dancer Of The Frigid Valley, the area boss who summons a second blade mid-fight and sends our hero quickly to his doom – but he does say the world design will be more like that of *Dark Souls* than *DSII*. That, and confirmation that he is helming the project, is more than enough for now. From Software is back on Xbox, Miyazaki has returned to the director's chair, and 2016 has its first truly essential game.

Nathan Brown

Metadata

PREVIOUSLY IN...



A great game set in a complex, interlocking world, soured only in that it ran like a dog on Xbox 360.



With Miyazaki elsewhere, this was the mongrel offspring of pedigree parentage. Dog references over.

Jump and shout

For the zero people who thought Souls games weren't already scary enough Miyazaki skipped *DSII* because he was working on *Bloodborne*, and despite its low-fantasy setting *DSIII* contains a few trace elements of the PS4 exclusive's Lovecraftian horror, with a new focus on jump scares. As we pass by one group of passive undead it suddenly erupts in a swirl of black smoke, and an indescribable black demon thing appears from the ether to one-shot us to the afterlife. Yeah, we jumped.

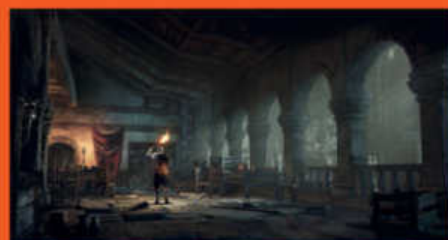




Fire tech has been greatly improved, and now sets anything it touches ablaze for a few seconds.



Once again, Miyazaki uses passive NPCs to signify the desperate state of the world. Keep an eye on this lot, though.



Praise the Sun! Or don't, because it's on its last legs, lending the world a faded, slightly washed-out look.

A lesser publication would make a 'crowning achievement' gag here. We'd never stoop to that, obviously.



This fellow's a big unit, but even the larger enemy types can be knocked on their butt with a Ready Stance attack.





PUBLISHER 2K GAMES / DEVELOPER GEARBOX SOFTWARE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

This is some of the best cel-shading we've ever seen. It looks damn tasty in full motion too.



Battleborn

Hands on with Gearbox's genre-defying multiplayer madness

Bluffer's Guide

Multiplayer shooter in which you protect the last star in the galaxy by shooting/stabbing/firing owls at alien scum.

Should we pick Montana, mini-gun wielding man mountain? Or Thorn, deadly with a bow-and-arrow? How about Rath, with his dual Katanas, or maybe Marquis, robot butler and sniping enthusiast? Definitely not Miko, the healer character – we're selfish jerks, not team players – but the variety is undeniably impressive. That's only five of the 25 characters Gearbox is promising, presumably hoping everyone will find a play style that suits them. We'll be happy just to be able to settle on one.

Luckily, we won't have to. Each mission starts your team on Level

One, quickly going up to Ten, and constantly rewards with new powers. Refreshed leveling also means you're not committed to any one character's progress, which encouraged us to try them all. Except Miko, of course, but as we say, we're selfish. It's a more accessible game, but the lack of long-term leveling up may hurt longevity.

Shooting will feel familiar to anyone who played *Borderlands*, which is no bad thing. Oscar Mike's assault rifle packs enough punch to keep shooter veterans happy, and Montana's mini-gun brings back fond memories of some of that series' more OTT weapons.

Cutlass strikes and crossblade slashes feel like worthy, damaging alternatives to emptying bullets into alien scum. Getting up close can cause brutal damage with the right character, but leaves you more vulnerable to attack. Even when we felt we'd picked one of the weaker characters, they all have advantages. Sometimes hanging back

and shooting the odd arrow is smarter than rushing up to bash someone with an axe.

Once Level Five is reached, a character unlocks an ultimate ability. These range from 'quite useful' to 'ridiculous game changer',

another great incentive to try all the characters. Long cooldowns on these powers stop you from relying on them, and teamwork is important to survival. Hang back to revive and protect team mates and they won't be as annoyed when you always muscle in as Rath and refuse to wield Miko's healing ray.

Novel as some of the heroes are, we're still bashing numbers out of enemies using weird and wonderful weapons. Those solid foundations are probably why the game feels well balanced, despite various players using magic, guns and swordplay, sometimes all simultaneously. Good luck keeping that balance when another 17 characters enter the fray, but as it stands now, we're really looking forward to trying more.

Tom Stone

ETA
2015

// Shooting will feel familiar to anyone who played *Borderlands* //



Got the power

Just firing a gun is so 2014...

Ultimate Abilities are special moves that usually change your team's strategy from 'let's work together, gang' to 'kill, kill, KILL'. Our favorites include Thorn's Field of Corruption, dealing huge damage every half a second to anything foolish enough to take a stroll in it. Rath also performs an almighty spin attack, basically transforming into some kind of samurai Beyblade, which instantly won Rath our highly coveted 'why the hell did we pick Thorn?' award.



Knights used to defecate in their armor, you know. They never show that in these games.

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / FORMAT XBOX ONE



For Honor

On with our hands, and off with their heads

Bluffer's Guide

It's knight vs samurai vs viking in Ubisoft Montreal's not-strictly-historically-accurate new game, which aims to be the *Call of Duty* of *mélée* fighters.

Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series is not everyone's thing, that's for sure. For the uninitiated, the games take place on large-scale historical battlefields, filled with hundreds of soldiers there to be sliced and diced, plus meatier unit types who offer a worthier challenge.

Fans love the strategic elements – it's less about swordsmanship and more about seeing the bigger picture, noting which parts of the battlefield are swamped and making your presence known there. Detractors simply can't get over the unsatisfying monotony of the combat – the bulk of the game.

For Honor, then, is a brand new multiplayer-heavy offering that plays out like a mass market *Dynasty Warriors* game, samurai armor and all. In our hands-on session, we played a four-on-four multiplayer offering called Dominion – which is only a few letters away from being *Call of Duty*'s Domination, and only a few rule tweaks, too. The eight of us were set loose on a huge medieval playground with three zones to capture, two of which were clustered close by in a field shadowed by an imposing castle, while the third requires a detour, through one of two winding

passageways, to a lonely rampart overlooking the battlefield.

We also shared the battlefield with dozens of CPU-controlled knights on both sides, who make a beeline for the zones and immediately start clashing, creating an environment that feels dirty and dangerous.

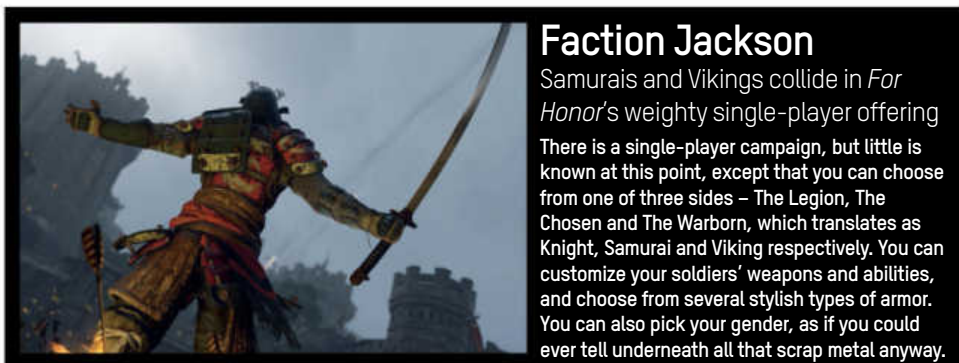
These AI drones can't seize territories – instead you take a zone by lopping through them with your sword.

Foot soldiers killed also adds to your points total, which goes up or down depending on how many zones are in your control. The idea is to nudge your team's score to about 1,000, at which point the human-controlled players stop respawning. Finish them all off before your score dips below that magic mark, and you're the victor.

But offing a human knight is a completely different proposition. It works like a deadly game of Simon Says: aggressors attack from one of three different directions – up, left, or right, and their choice flashes briefly up on the screen, giving you a short window to match it with your shield. Complex it isn't, but it's weighty, satisfying and visceral in a way *Dynasty Warriors*' flimsy fights aren't, and the addition of friendly fire means *For Honor*'s duels have the capacity for the kind of tactical depth that can't fully be explored on the E3 show floor. Alex Dale

ETA
2016

//The battles work, in effect, like a deadly game of Simon Says//



Faction Jackson

Samurais and Vikings collide in *For Honor*'s weighty single-player offering

There is a single-player campaign, but little is known at this point, except that you can choose from one of three sides – The Legion, The Chosen and The Warborn, which translates as Knight, Samurai and Viking respectively. You can customize your soldiers' weapons and abilities, and choose from several stylish types of armor. You can also pick your gender, as if you could ever tell underneath all that scrap metal anyway.



Jacob's dapper cane handily doubles up as a weapon.

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT QUEBEC / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Assassin's Creed Syndicate

Hands-on time has us swinging – if not singing – from the rooftops...

Bluffer's Guide

The newly expanded Ubisoft Quebec's first big *AC* title winds the clock forward to Industrial Revolution-era London, where templars and technology collide...

They say the streets of London are paved with gold, but in *Assassin's Creed Syndicate's* 19th Century mock-up of the British capital, it's the rooftops that glisten with opportunity. We're in the sodden boots of Jacob Frye, the male half of *Syndicate's* brother-sister double act, and we're on the run from a gang of street toughs, after a mission to rescue some unfortunate members of our gang, the Rooks, from a vicious Templar beating goes horribly wrong.

Previous *Assassin's Creed* games train you to look to the ground for opportunities to break your pursuers' line of sight – hay bales, wells, swarms

of crowds – but your first instinct will be to look to the skies. Jacob's rope launcher tool was born out of necessity – Victorian London's paved streets are too wide to allow you to bound from rooftop to rooftop without mechanical assistance – but it comes in rather handy when you're in a tight spot, too.

Look up to the heavens and where your gaze meets a ledge that's within rope-launching range, a prompt to press LB will appear. Jacob latches on to the targeted area with his launcher and ziplines directly up to it, albeit slightly slower than Batman, and without the same impressive range.

But Ubisoft Quebec doesn't want the rope launcher to be an 'instant escape' get-out clause, so your enemies will continue to give chase, homing in on your last known location. This is represented on screen by a ghosted-out silhouette, a conceit previously seen in *Assassin's Creed Unity*, but

with its origins in stablemate Ubisoft series *Splinter Cell*.

In its current guise, *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* is having trouble reconciling the authenticity of its world with the need to keep up the thrill of the chase – enemy foot soldiers bound up the side of buildings after you in a manner that looks faintly ridiculous, and needs refinement before release.

Either way, we manage to evade detection by hanging off the side of an adjacent rooftop, and sure enough the guards lose interest, allowing us to resume. Back in stealth mode, we find that picking off the remaining enemies is more traditional *Creed* fare, with the emphasis on scuttling around rooftops and picking off stragglers whenever you get the chance. We finish by discovering the LB button has one last trick up its sleeve – focus on a window when it's in grabbing range and you'll leap straight through in one fluid

ETA
23 OCT

//Focus on a window when in grabbing range and you'll leap through//

Q & A



François Pelland

Syndicate's senior producer on the trials of dragging the series into the 19th century

You have two lead characters, and also two play styles.

What's the reasoning behind this split?

I remember two years ago we started to think about how we could tell a modern story in a modern era, and we decided at that point to tell the story of twins with very different personalities. Jacob is an extremely charismatic, confident personality. He's a leader. On the other side, you have Evie who tends to be more cautious, more on the strategic side. She has stealth skills that are specific to her. It's that duality between the two within the story that really makes those characters stand out. I guess that it was a creative direction, it was a story and narrative direction right from the start.

One of the main features of London is that it's split into two by the Thames. How do you make moving about feel cohesive?

We treat the Thames almost as its own borough, because it really does have its own story, it has its own way of functioning, I should say. Without getting into too much detail too far in advance, we knew we needed to be true to what the purpose of the river Thames was back then. London was controlling a quarter of the population of the

be no more swords. We've moved into an age where if there was any kind of brawl on the streets, it was making the headlines. So that's certainly very different from what we saw only 75 years before this period, with the French Revolution. So we wanted to give the combat a more brutal and visceral feel to it, hence the emphasis on

// "We've moved into an age where a street brawl would make the news" //

entire world. It was the center of the industrial production of the world. So it was a key port, with boats shipping production in and out. We'll be going into more detail about this later.

We're glad to see the series coming closer up to date. How has the more modern setting affected the combat?

One thing that we realized right at the start was that we're past the medieval period, so there could

concealed weapons. To that end, we're bringing back the multi-kill multi-finisher from *ACIII*.

Can you jump on trains in free-roam, if you time it right?

Oh yeah, absolutely. At Victoria station, for example, you can climb on top of a train. You can unhinge wagons, you can stay on the main carriage, and you can go all across the city by staying on there. It's a cool fast travel tool if you want to explore the city.



This man might well be about to find out how unwise it is to spill Jacob's pint.

Metadata

BEST BIT...



Tearing around Victorian London in an untameable carriage is as wild and woolly as advertised – it reminds us of the horse carriage bit from *Assassin's Creed II*, right down to the rooftop scuffles.

motion, making it easier to transition between interiors and exteriors.

We'd be lying through our top hats if we said our time in London didn't feel disjointed – *Syndicate* bears all the hallmarks of a series that's trying to rebuild on the fly, throwing new features plundered from other games onto an ageing framework. It's not the root and branch overhaul the series needs, but with the rope launcher at least, *Assassin's Creed* has hit upon a mechanic that's solid gold.

Alex Dale

It's taken long enough for the series to reach the greatest city on Earth.



PREVIEW



If you can't take the heat, stay away from the new Sunbreaker Titans.

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER BUNGIE / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Around the time of *The Taken King*'s launch, Xbox players will finally get some previously PS4-exclusive Strikes and weapons.



Destiny: The Taken King

New gear, a bigger raid, and a very particular set of skills

Bluffer's Guide

The third expansion to Bungie's intoxicating sci-fi MMOFPS in which you shoot things in the hope of getting good loot, then shoot the same things some more to upgrade it.

There's been a bit of a fuss about *The Taken King*, to put it mildly. *Destiny*'s third official expansion will, we're assured, be substantially larger than the two that preceded it, but then it should be. This, unlike the others, will be a full-priced release, available either in standalone form for existing players to upgrade to, or bundled together with the base game and its prior expansions.

It's the latter that's got players' backs up the most, with a costly *Collector's Edition* announced as the only way to lay hands on an exclusive set of emotes and other cosmetics. After the predictable outcry, Bungie relented, and said it would sell them separately, as a digital bundle. A snip, you'll surely agree, at \$20. Somehow, Bungie made out like it was doing us all a favor.

Bungie isn't getting specific with the numbers – either on mission count or level cap – but we're shown a new area and promised fresh missions, quests, bounties and strikes. While the new enemy faction, the titular Taken, is just another reskinned version of existing enemy types (albeit with twists, such as the Psion that splits into two again and again until you wipe them all out), there will be plenty of new ways to put them down. A new subclass for the three playable classes means new grenades, perks and supers – a lightning storm for the Warlock, a Void-powered bow and arrow for the Hunter, and for the Titan an absolutely gigantic solar hammer that can either be thrown at distant enemies or used as a melee weapon, with those hit by it careening off into the

distance (and setting anything they touch on fire).

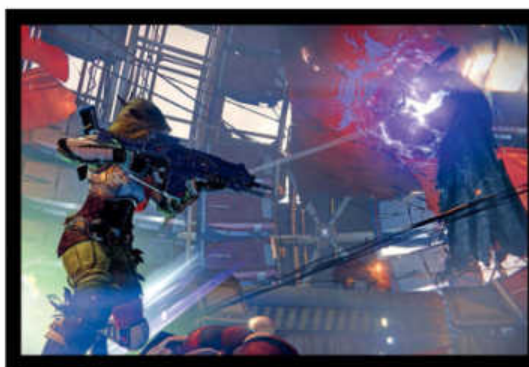
While we've often felt like using something like that on Bungie's design teams, all will be forgiven if the new raid can match the quality of the Vault of Glass. Bungie says this will be the game's biggest raid to date, and that it shows the studio's new way of thinking

about encounters, mechanics and puzzles. We certainly can't wait to find out. *Destiny* players are an odd bunch: we moan incessantly – and more often than not, with good reason – but we never quite manage to stop playing. Even

Bungie must know that the party can't last forever – and that when the music stops and the lights come up, it'll take more than a \$20 bundle of dance moves to put things right.

Nathan Brown

ETA
15 SEP



Balance of power

How do you top a rocket launcher with heat-seeking follow-up cluster bombs?

Though we've had a play with a few new legendary weapons, none had been upgraded to unlock their perks. While the final game will surely have more to offer, we're keen to find out how Bungie is treating the current game's most powerful weapons. Will there be meaningful alternatives to Fatebringer, Gjallarhorn and the like, or will we not be able to use them because they're no longer powerful enough? Bungie is saying nothing.



The visuals are majestic, the power of Unreal Engine 4 rendering thousands of particles at once.



PUBLISHER 505 GAMES / DEVELOPER THREE ONE ZERO / FORMAT XBOX ONE



Adrift

Your station is broken and everyone's dead. Try not to scream – it won't help here

Bluffer's Guide

Float around your ruined space station, the Spiritus, fixing things and intrusively listening to crewmates' audio logs.

The year is 2027 and you're 462km above Earth, which puts you in that sweet spot between 'Instagram-worthy view' and 'burning alive in the planet's upper atmosphere'. Oh, and there's been a problem. Just a small one.

Since you're on a microgravity research laboratory, however, there's no such thing as a small problem. Even the tiniest issue can snowball into something mission-destroying. Waking up groggy among wreckage, you don't know exactly what went down, but you know it was bad because there are a lot of glass shards

and alarms going off and holes where there shouldn't be.

Six months since our first hands-on, in which we did little more than float through a tunnel for several minutes, *Adrift* feels more like an actual game. Your main job now is survival – to repair the only evacuation vehicle and return home. Annoyingly, and life-threateningly, your suit is leaking oxygen, so there's a constant need to grab floating canisters and replenish it. It gives a necessary nagging tension.

Our next task is getting the communications array online so we can rendezvous with Earth, and this involves travelling through

the damaged station to three silos and rebooting them. With its design, the dev strikes a balance between realism and futuristic fantasy: one chamber houses an immense, blossoming tree surrounded by thousands of petals. Each is a physical object that reacts to your movements. The ISS is the current largest habitable satellite in existence, but upon taking the

Spiritus' elevator and casting eyes over its gleaming solar arrays, trusses and numerous modules, this looks at least triple the size.

Using our thrusters on the right trigger we approach an audio log. These are a major fixture, and give an otherwise lifeless world character. This one belongs to Theresa Lopez who shares a touching anecdote about dressing as an astronaut for Halloween, and how she's thankful for finally getting to realise that dream. In this so-called 'first-person experience', guns and violence are swapped for emotional impact as you unravel threads of story to their conclusions.

This silent vacuum is the perfect place in which to mediate on their meaning. At its core, *Adrift* seems to be a game about surviving a world-inverting disaster and finding a way to turn things around for the better. But as revealed through your crew's musings, that disaster – and how you overcome it – is different for everyone. Ben Griffin

ETA
SEP

//Annoyingly, and life-threateningly, your suit is leaking//



Roll over, Beethoven

Snooping on a man's private life

Spiritus systems specialist Andrew McDonagh is involved in a poignant early subplot. Through audio logs he admits his failure as a father ("I promised Lucy I was going to be there for her. I promised myself I wouldn't leave her like this again") and expresses pride over his daughter's piano talents. As you spot his body floating lifelessly among wreckage and Lucy's rendition of Beethoven's *Sonata No. 8* plays delicately in the background, the effect is heartbreaking.

With enough momentum you'll barely break a sweat in combat with KrugerSec.

PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER DICE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Mirror's Edge Catalyst

Faith's open-world origin story is no walk in the parkour

People saying things like, "The setting was the real protagonist of this piece," is usually cause to punch them directly in the face, but with *Mirror's Edge* that sort of windbagery is very nearly justified. Here was a gleaming futuristic city rendered in bold primary colors, a perfect playground where even the sewers were picturesque. Seven years on, *Mirror's Edge Catalyst* shifts focus to Faith Connors, no longer fleetingly glimpsed as a reflection or shadow, but the fully fleshed-out hero of an epic origin story.

Faith is a data courier living off the grid, eschewing WhatsApp and Snapchat to deliver top-secret information the old-fashioned way – with parkour. In the City of Glass, privacy is over as citizens willingly relinquish their freedoms to an all-powerful conglomerate for peace and convenience. Some factions make a stand, however, and Faith is drawn into their struggle. The story spans

Bluffer's Guide

After Faith encounters shady goings on within the corporation-controlled City of Glass, she must rally against evil CEO Gabriel Kruger and become a catalyst of change.

decades, with flashbacks detailing her childhood, training, a stint in prison and how she got that badass tattoo.

Our hands-on begins with a man named Icarus giving Faith a high-tech contact lens that displays stock prices, advertises health foods, and reports entertainment news such as fan outrage over *Game of Thrones* parody 'Play of Woes'. Already the world feels bigger, richer. Thankfully she can turn off the feed (it's used primarily for waypointing and video calls) and concentrate on what's important: running quite fast.

Icarus' route finding options lead us to the Centurion Yards. Since the world is now a sandbox, we can go anywhere we see – all accessed without a loading screen. We've got three activities to choose from now. Dash is a 30-second sprint and shows off Faith's speedy flair. Aside from being able to now seamlessly navigate rounded corners there's not much in the way of new moves, but she's

noticeably faster. *Catalyst* is all about preserving momentum by chaining together jumps, hopping up ledges and sliding under scaffolding.

We try Billboard Hack next, not so much a test of reflexes as spatial awareness as Faith attempts to electronically tag a huge monitor. These puzzles involve pausing to find your next route, and although some argue the original game's stop/start nature was irritating, it's at least authentic – there's more to the sport of parkour than running in a straight line.

Metadata

FIX THIS...



Mirror's Edge's gunplay was arguably its weakest part: firearms felt weak and wielding them compromised your climbing. *Catalyst* dodges the problem by preventing Faith from picking them up altogether.

ETA
26 FEB



Fascism has never looked so stylish. Move over, Mussolini! Oh, you're already dead.

//A futuristic contact lens reports fan outrage over *Game of Thrones* parody 'Play of Woes'//

Catalyst isn't as aimless as you'd think, despite being open-world. Setting a waypoint on your map uses your contact lens to paint relevant pieces of scenery red, and organically carves out a route. Although it's more vertically diverse than before, level layout aids flow: stacked ledges function like staircases, platforms springboard you to new heights and ziplines let you descend in style. Controls are more nuanced, too: LB triggers 'up' actions such as jumps and springboards; LT triggers 'down' ones like crouching, sliding and rolling.

Delivery is the last mission and demonstrates *Catalyst*'s vastly improved combat. Faith must deliver a package and eliminate a squad of KrugerSec guards – and with multiple variations she has her work cut out. There are lightly armoured Protectors who rival Faith in speed, and bulky Sentinels wielding heavy weapons. Between them sit Guardians, who use both freerunning and guns on you.

DICE's choice to eliminate clumsy

shoot-outs focuses the spotlight on pure melee combat – the only guns Faith uses are the two attached to her shoulders. Momentum is your greatest ally, letting you KO foes with a single punch or kick, and the way enemies are positioned often enables you to string mad combos. First we perform a wall-run-into-flying kick, then slide and upwards-punch another in the groin before triggering a new slow-mo Transference Attack that switches

The City of Glass looks likely to include a full day/night cycle.



the camera to third-person as Faith spectacularly channels her speed into a violent finisher. It's fast, fluid, and you feel untouchable.

But while combat's smarter and navigation's faster, the most important improvement concerns characters and story. A protagonist with personality and a grand setting that's no longer an exquisitely empty husk gives *Catalyst* some much-needed emotional impact.

Ben Griffin



Bag lady

Collectibles in the City of Glass

Spread throughout the environment are floating holograms called Gridleaks. It's not yet clear what you'll get from collecting them (XP? Map data?) but, like the floating tokens in *Crackdown*, they encourage exploration. There are also Runner bags. Whereas the first game contained a mere 30, *Catalyst* features hundreds. We grabbed one stashed in a vent, but we didn't open it – is there an option to send it to lost property?

Rep Attack is an eight-player skirmish in which racers compete to earn as much 'rep' as possible within nine minutes. Rep is earned, as always, by driving like a madman.

PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER GHOST GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Need for Speed

Reboot takes the junk out of the trunk

Bluffer's Guide

EA's attempt to reinvent the wheel. A shot at uniting the open-world goodness of modern *Need for Speeds* with the street racing culture of the series' heyday.

At first thought, the idea of a *Need for Speed* reboot is ludicrous. It's not like there are fansites out there dedicated to unraveling the intertwining plot lines that cleverly link the grimy underground scene of *Need for Speed: Carbon* with *Porsche Unlimited's* highfalutin' tour of Europe, is it? But maybe it's not a need to reset the series' plot, but to reset its form.

The *Need for Speed* badge has been pinned onto so many types of racing game by so many developers over the years that the name means different things to different people. The series is now sensibly in the hands of a single custodian – Swedish dev Ghost Games

– and this 'reboot' is an attempt to meld the best parts of 15 years of racing heritage and evolution into an alloy that'll shine for everyone.

So it stands to reason that before we were set loose on the streets of Ventura Bay, a nocturnal open-world playground styled on the West Coast, we paid homage to the series' *Underground* heyday by delving into the garage and fine-tuning our car – a BMW M3 Sport Evolution – to infinity. The level of customization is impressive – everything from headlights and hoods to skirts and side-mirrors can be decked out in neon colours previously thought beyond the visible human spectrum. It's also possible to stack spoiler upon spoiler until your car's back end looks suitably aerodynamic/ridiculous.

It's all for show, of course, but then the game is structured around social interaction and one-upping your friends (with the trade-off that

an internet connection is required), so there's every motivation to look your best out on the streets. More tangible changes can be made to the car's performance by heading back into the garage and tweaking the handling – you can make large-brushstroke changes to the suspension or transmission, or you can go further

down the rabbit hole, tweaking the steering response and the pressure in your tires.

But you can also just pick one of two preset styles – 'grip' or 'drift'. This is where things get interesting, because both are analogous to the handling of games past. Grip replicates the wild, front-heavy steering of *Underground*, *Most Wanted* (2005 vintage) et al, while Drift channels the tighter, powersliding focus of the later Criterion games, such as *Hot Pursuit* and *Most Wanted* (2012).

Crafting an open-world environment that can successfully

ETA
3 NOV

//It's an attempt to meld the best parts of racing heritage into an alloy//

Q & A



Marcus Nilsson

Ghost Games' executive producer on bringing NFS back to its roots, and why pretty pics = prizes

Metadata

OR TRY...



NFS: RIVALS
Ghost Games' first NFS did a good cover version of *Most Wanted*, but lacked identity.



FORZA HORIZON 2
Classic sim handling, but you're set loose on a sun-soaked open-world playground.

accommodate two very different driving styles is going to be some challenge, but our hands-on session suggests that the downtown portion of Ventura Bay, at least, is up to the challenge – packed with tight 90° turns to throw your car into. It remains to be seen whether the rest of the area's curvy roads – which take in staple *Need for Speed* sights such as canyons and harboursides – will be as accommodating, but what we've seen so far has our engines revving.

Alex Dale

Transitions between FMV and racing action are as slick as, er, a slick tire. (Sorry.)



challenge of making a game that worked simultaneously with both models?

That idea actually came from Craig Sullivan, the creative director. He said to me, "If we're going to make this definitive *Need for Speed* experience, we have 100 million people who have played the more grippy *Underground* style, and we have the 30 or 40 million people that have played the *Rivals* style.

human voice. It will treat your friend's play as if it is part of the narrative experience. We also have a new snapshot system as well, which is taking pictures of a lot of different moments – [they go] out to the *Need for Speed* network where people can 'like' them, and those likes are being pushed back into the game as currency. So you get progression from sharing your photos. The Xbox One

It wasn't so long ago that you would see two or even three NFS games per year. What did you learn from that period of oversaturation?

Taking the year off is obviously an answer to that, right? We used it to figure out who we are and what we should be. Was it confusing to have *Need for Speed: The Run* [six months after having] *Shift 2*? Absolutely. It is – not only does it saturate *Need for Speed*, but it also confuses you, 'What is the experience I get from *Need for Speed*? So, this reboot of the franchise is about getting our foundation correctly laid out – what you see here is what the *Need for Speed* experience will be for the foreseeable future.

You've got two baseline handling models, which seem to be roughly aligned with *Underground* and *Rivals*. For me, those two types of handling models were integral parts of the games, and they were built around them. What was the

//What you see here is what the NFS experience will be for the foreseeable future//

Let's cater to both!" So we put in a lever that you can just pull.

Controversially, *Need for Speed* requires an always-online internet connection: what's the pay-off for the inconvenience?

We've been pretty big with Autolog throughout the years and, as we know, it's a really powerful feature. This time around we're going to give it more of a

has really good built-in systems to make videos and stream them, which we are also going to use.

There's a wave of mid-noughties nostalgia at the moment. What it is about that era that captures people?

To some degree it's obviously nostalgia, but we love the chance to rebuild experiences that you've had in the past but with much more capabilities.



FINISHED SYMPHONIES

The origins and future of Xbox Game Preview



FINISHED SYMPHONIES

The origins and future of Xbox Game Preview

Writer: Daniel Griliopoulos

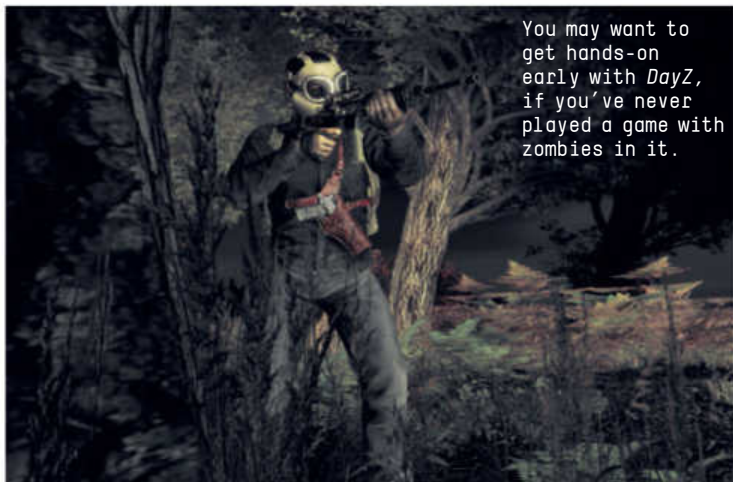
To a cynic, playing unfinished games on consoles doesn't sound like anything new. Many of us tried to play *Assassin's Creed Unity* or *Fallout: New Vegas* at launch, and those certainly weren't finished until months later. Older readers might remember the first *Saint's Row*, which was so buggy someone wrote a song about it. But we're talking about games that are only partially developed and will be finished later, but which you can buy now. They are mostly functional, but are probably unbalanced and have many missing features. As *The Long Dark*'s Raphael van Lierop put it to us, "Our game is already shippable as a complete experience, we're just not finished with it yet."

What we're talking about is the Xbox Game Preview program, announced at E3 by Chris Charla. Here you can buy games, starting with *The Long Dark* and *Elite: Dangerous*, and watch them develop. If you're not sure whether you want the game or not, or if it's in a state you're not happy paying for yet, there's a 60-minute trial available to try it out (something we'd like to see extended to all downloadable games).

So why would you buy a game from Early Access, rather than waiting for it to come out? Well, firstly, it should prove cheaper. The first game to do this in a big way was *Minecraft*, way before it arrived on Xbox 360. Notch released the first terrifyingly buggy and simple version of the game free in 2009, then it crept up to €5 for pre-alpha then €10 at alpha, before hitting €15 at beta, and €20 at launch. At each stage, players got a bit more for their money.

Secondly, on PC at least, you can be part of the development process. Developers, you may be surprised to hear, are human beings just like us. Unless they're doing a really boring genre-heavy title, their design document is normally a mess of features that they'd love to include if they had infinite time, talent and

Flaunt too much sweet gear in *DayZ* and you'll become a target for bandits.



You may want to get hands-on early with *DayZ*, if you've never played a game with zombies in it.

DayZ

■ INTERVIEWEE BRIAN HICKS, PRODUCER

DEVELOPER BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE / PREVIEW RELEASE TBA

DayZ started as a free mod for the hardcore military sim ARMA III, but became a standalone game at the end of 2013. It's a survival sim where food and water are scarce, and the only things more deadly than its zombies are everything else.

"Originally our aim was to look at releasing traditionally, on both console platforms. However, Microsoft fairly aggressively chased us down early on to discuss the idea for a Game Preview program. It was clear it was serious, and the idea and motivation behind it seemed exciting – the next step in bringing consumers 'behind the curtain' when it comes to game development – so we signed on!

"We're not talking dates for console releases just yet, but as the title will hit consoles much later than on PC, the console experience will be more refined, and feature-complete. I envision console gamers will see more gameplay and content evolution, and less of the feature and engine development the PC users were able to experience, as they come on so early in development. For the PC, we're hoping to see the transition into beta at the end of this year with an intended release from Early Access mid

next year... For us, I don't think there is much difference between the two platforms. PC has the strength of modding, but the Xbox One has its own strengths. With the core engine work we've been going through – moving to DirectX 11, and following up with DirectX 12 – it sets us up early for the Xbox One. We'll have to change our approach to server hosting, but I think it'll make for a more streamlined approach to getting into the game.

"The approach, moving into development for Xbox One, is specifically aimed at designing a *DayZ* experience that plays to the platform's strengths. For the Xbox, that stretches from social aspects of the Dashboard and Xbox Live service, to using tech like 'Meld' to communicate the development of the game.

"We've still got some outstanding areas of *DayZ* to come. Base building, advanced vehicles, character life span and soft skills, and even aerial transport! In addition to that, *DayZ* development will continue past 1.0, with more content and features coming throughout the following years. Bohemia Interactive has a 15-year history of shipping excellent games and outstanding experiences – *DayZ* will hit 1.0, and keep going!"

FEATURE

DayZ is so named because a day's about as long as you can survive. (Er, this might not be true.)



money. Input from players lets them know what is and isn't working, and where they should focus their efforts.

Thirdly, the developer gets paid while it's making the game. That might not seem huge to you, but in these days of straitened economics, not having to borrow money from the bank significantly improves a developer's quality of life, and the likelihood that it will continue working on the project.

There are problems, of course. Take Double Fine for example. Although it's made some of the most characterful games around – like cult classic *Psychonauts* and Heavy-Metal-strategy-Jack-Black-'em-up *Brütal Legend* – and though studio founder and industry legend Tim Schafer is better loved than nine out of ten puppies, its Early Access games have actually been a bit miss and miss.

If you're a Xbox Live Gold member, you may have played its quirky fantasy

tactics game *Massive Chalice*. This was a fun-sounding game – *XCOM* meets *Golden Axe* meets *Decline & Fall* – which attracted a reasonable Kickstarter backing, and went quickly into Early Access. The game's eventual release, however, had core design flaws including the regular death of your characters and a slow, small world, which undermined efforts to replicate *XCOM*'s success. The Early Access period ended quickly and quietly, and the game was pushed out with a limited feature set.

This wasn't the first time that Double Fine had failed to deliver on an Early Access game. Previously, its *Dwarf Fortress*-inspired space station management sim *Spacebase DF-9* ran into trouble in Early Access, and its ambitious five-year development cycle was truncated to just 18 months. The studio was spending more making it than it was taking in, as Schafer wrote



The Long Dark

INTERVIEWEE RAPHAEL VAN LIEROP, FOUNDER
DEVELOPER HINTERLAND / **PREVIEW RELEASE** OUT NOW

The Long Dark is a first-person survival game set in remote Canadian mountains. Though the setting is post-apocalyptic, the threats are real – cold, starvation and wild animals – which makes the game much harder than a simple zombie-shoot.

"When Microsoft approached us to be a Game Preview launch title, we were enticed by the opportunity to be the first survival game on Xbox One, as well as one of only two titles to launch with Game Preview.

"It took 26 days to go from Xbox One dev kits to a completed Xbox One version that passed Microsoft cert – which is

unheard of. We were only able to do it, really, because we built the game on Unity, and we had a ton of support from Microsoft.

"We did a fair bit of work to overhaul the UI and get controller support working, but our Steam players have been asking for this for a while so we felt good about it. We discovered we had a lot of work to do to get the game running at a smooth 30 FPS – we have big environments with tons of objects and a long draw distance. We still have work to do there. But in general the development effort went pretty smoothly – it was just intense because we were trying to hit a very tight deadline: E3.

Why sit in your room doing nothing when you can sit in this post-apocalyptic room instead?

"The greatest challenge was getting a Game Preview up and running, as they were building the program as we were bringing the game to console. There were a lot of shared moments where we were all asking each other, 'We're going to get our stuff done but are you guys going to make it?' It became kind of a running joke.

"*The Long Dark* is super solid. On average our players put 10-15 hours into the game and many are in the 50+ hour range, so we offer great value for the \$19.99 price point. And just as on Steam, anyone buying on Game Preview will get full Season One story mode episodes on launch."



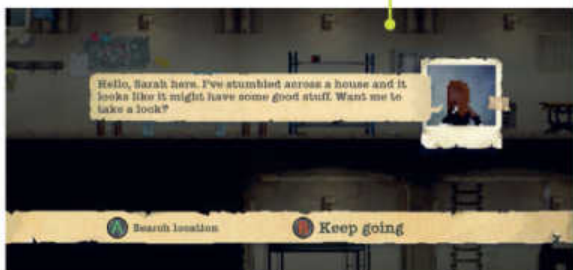
at the time: "We wanted to keep working on *Spacebase* for years. But *Spacebase* spends more money than it brings in, and that's just not something we can afford to do any more. Set up against the expectation of the game being in development as long as *Prison Architect* or *Dwarf Fortress*, it's hard not to find fault in the game by comparison. But we continued to sell the game, and will continue to sell the game, because we feel that based solely on its own merits, *Spacebase DF-9* is still a fun, clever, hilarious, beautiful and complete game."

That explanation didn't satisfy many buyers, who didn't agree with Schafer; to them, the game was truncated compared to the description that inspired them to buy the game, and they felt they'd been misled. Playing it now, it does feel empty – but that's part of the risk of Early Access. What you're buying isn't the ultimate aim of the creators, but *access* to a work in progress. That's why Early Access games tend to be considerably cheaper than others – because they're feature-light and may never even make it to that final version.

Double Fine is a high-profile studio, with large overheads from its expensive, established staff, so it's not entirely surprising that Early Access hasn't worked out well for it. Smaller, more agile studios have turned Early Access to their advantage with more success, including a game Schafer mentioned, *Prison Architect*. British developer Introversion (known for *Uplink* and *Darwinia*) released this prison construction and management game on an Early Access program in 2012. The game was in alpha and certainly not feature-complete. Despite that, it went on to rack up over a million sales, and looks set to have a final version released late in 2015.

Similarly, Simon Roth's Machine Studios had almost exactly the same model and route as Double Fine – getting a reasonable amount of money from Kickstarter for a sandbox space game, *Maia*, then raising more by taking the Early Access path – but by

You are but one button press away from either a stash of food or a funeral for Sarah.



Sheltered

■ INTERVIEWEE SONNY MEEK, FOUNDER / DEVELOPER UNICUBE
PREVIEW RELEASE 2015

Sheltered is a sandbox survival game about getting your nuclear family through a nuclear apocalypse.

"Unicube was originally a two-person team founded by my colleague, Dean Foster, and I. However, since signing to Team17, we've been working within their studio, with six of us working on the game.

"*Sheltered* is a complicated game under the hood. We've got some really cool stuff planned: crafting, encounters, exploration and there are a lot of different variables. Which means that there are a lot of interconnected interactions which all combine to have an impact on how the game will play. We wanted to make a game that will even surprise us when it's finished!

"Our inclusion in this program means we'll have lots of eyes on the game to ensure it's balanced and plays well. Responding to community feedback and suggestions means we can deliver the best possible game. Because we're using Unity as our development platform, it has been fairly easy to rapidly test the changes we make on the console. Since working with Team17 we've led development so far using the Xbox One controller

to ensure it feels and plays great on console. How users interact is so important, we've spent a lot of time to get this right and like to think we've got something that works really well.

"We feel the Xbox Game Preview program is a great opportunity for us to increase the scale of the game gradually, resulting in a better end product. The concept of the program is quite a departure from the traditional model of buying finished products. We weren't sure how players were going to react to it, so we really felt obliged to deliver something very stable that players could have fun with straight away.

"At the moment we're working on a lot of customization options for the shelter. When you begin you'll be able to fully customize your starting family, which is a choice of two parents and two children – they can all be any gender, color and have their own customized clothes. You even get to choose a family pet! You'll start in a pretty grim shelter at first: it's dark, there's graffiti and any items you craft will be their most basic version. But eventually you'll be able to improve and customize your shelter..."

Docking in *Elite* may look serene, but it's hard as hell. You'll crash loads.

Elite: Dangerous

INTERVIEWEE GARY RICHARDS, XBOX ONE SENIOR PRODUCER
DEVELOPER FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS / **PREVIEW RELEASE** OUT NOW

A follow-up to David Braben's stunning Elite games, set in a beautiful 1:1 recreation of our galaxy which you traverse in a small spaceship, trading, fighting and simply exploring.

"We had such a positive experience from doing the PC beta that the opportunity to be part of the Game Preview program was too good to miss. It allows us to engage with players, responding to feedback and refining areas of the game more quickly than with a full release. It's also a chance to do something completely unique in the console space.

"What you get on Xbox One is the full game – the training missions, the full massively multiplayer galaxy. We also made some additions, like a

new controller UI layer, new controls, and all the things Xbox One players expect – Achievements, Hero Stats, Friends List support and so on.

"One thing we HAD to do was create a truly great controller layout. We'd always supported the Xbox controller, but for Xbox One we created a new UI layer and context menus on every face button, to squeeze an incredibly deep control set onto a gamepad without needing a keyboard.

"Coming to Xbox One has allowed us to develop our new PvP mode – Close Quarters Combat. We're testing that as part of Early Access, too, then bringing it to all formats later.

"We already had a multi-platform engine (our COBRA tech has powered a number of Xbox games) so bringing *Elite*:

The interface is elegantly tuned to fit the Xbox One controller. It's a smart port of a giant game.

Dangerous to Xbox One wasn't as challenging as it could have been. That's not to downplay the team's talent. Getting the game running on Xbox One is one thing, but getting it running well is another matter.

"A big challenge is supporting features such as Friends List, voice chat, Achievements and Hero Stats. We already had our own voice chat and Friends List built for PC and Mac, so we had to do additional work to support the equivalents on Xbox.

"*Elite: Dangerous* was always meant to be a constantly expanding game and we've had a number of huge updates on PC and Mac already (all are in the Xbox One version) but we couldn't have invested so much time and work into CQC if we hadn't been bringing the game to Xbox One."



THE EARLY ACCESS GAMES WE WANT ON XBOX ONE



SUBNAUTICA

We could describe this as a real-world submerged *Minecraft* or an underwater adventure, but that wouldn't be doing it justice.



SPACE ENGINEERS

A multiplayer sandbox where you construct giant space stations and spaceships, and mine asteroids. A lot more fun than it sounds. No, honestly.



DARKWOOD

An unforgiving survival horror game, experienced from the top-down, *Darkwood* looks creepy, kooky and very, very spooky, and we want to explore.



PRISON ARCHITECT

A simple premise – build and manage a maximum-security prison – but the depth of the simulation makes this fiendishly difficult and curiously emergent.



FROZEN CORTEX

A turn-based American Football simulation where the players are robots? A huge variety of game modes and cunning mechanics make it a joy to play.



One of *Elite*'s planned updates will allow you to walk around inside the ships, marveling at your hard-earned equipment.



"EVERY SINGLE DECISION I MAKE HAS TO BE JUSTIFIED TO THOUSANDS OF PLAYERS..."

keeping his team size low and keeping sales going through regular updates, he's managed to keep production going for much longer than *DF-9*.

"Using Early Access purely for funding, and relying on it for anything other than a supplement to the development war chest seems to be where the high profile mistakes have come from," he says. "You need to be able to grow and shrink development based on what is coming in and going out at any time, and can't take anything for granted. Time and money can disappear very quickly, and so can your reputation." That's a flexibility that Double Fine didn't seem to have, but smaller indies like Roth do.

So if you want to avoid getting burned buying a Xbox Game Preview title, it's worth watching out for the games that change regularly and devs who listen to the community. "Early Access was a genuinely unique opportunity to work with my community in building the game," Roth told us. "It fundamentally changes the way you approach building a title. Every single

decision I make has to be justified to thousands upon thousands of players, forcing me to reflect deeply on my design all throughout development."

That doesn't mean that failures are confined to the big devs and successes to the small. Several Early Access titles have failed completely, and more spectacularly than *Spacebase DF-9*. *The Stomping Land*, a multiplayer dinosaur survival game headed up by an ex-*Skyrim* animator, was extremely promising when launched on Kickstarter and then Early Access in early 2013, with a launch date of May 2014. Then the lead developer vanished. In late 2014, Valve pulled the game from Early Access; after a short reinstatement, it was pulled again in early 2015, and shows no sign of reappearing. Both backers and gamers lost their money.

Roth admits that it's a difficult route for a developer to go down: "The main challenge of early access is support. You are releasing something a hundred times buggier than what users would expect from a final shipped product.

This means you spend a huge amount of time working with users to solve their issues. On PC this is a terrifying time-sink, it cost us many months on *Maia*, and can be quite demoralizing when issues flood in at a high rate. Although, I imagine releasing an alpha on fixed hardware such as the Xbox One would make it far more manageable."

That's a key point. The single-size-fits-all hardware of the Xbox One means devs don't have to customize the game to every single machine, as with PC. The single operating system means that the developer knows that the game will work and no software should interfere. All they've got to worry about is making the game work well.

And that's not a problem confined to Game Preview titles, of course. Although there are only two of them at the time of writing, we're confident you'll see an awful lot of weird and wonderful games either moving from PC, or coming straight to Xbox One. Given that the trials will be totally free, we expect you'll end up giving most of them a try. ■



SUNLESS SEA

A shipbound exploration of the hellish seas surrounding Fallen London, *Sunless Sea* is a puzzling, story-heavy dystopia, and very difficult indeed.



INVISIBLE, INC.

A turn-based cyberpunk strategy game where your fragile agents infiltrate major corporations in pursuit of riches. And cyber is by far our favorite kind of punk.



INFINIFACTORY

A puzzle game in which you've been kidnapped by little green men and women and made to work in their craft workshops. You can even make your own puzzles!



THE MAGIC CIRCLE

A first-person and terribly meta game about the blockbuster games industry itself, coming from the designers behind *BioShock 2* and *Thief III*.



SPACE BEAST TERROR FRIGHT

An awesome name matched with hardcore gameplay. Play co-op as marines dispatched to abandoned spacecraft.

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REVIEWS

The most important Xbox releases rated



ELITE: DANGEROUS

The whole galaxy on your TV screen. (p60)

THIS MONTH IN FACTS

OXM'S FAVOURITE PLANETS (THAT AREN'T MARS)

ALEX: Earth. Breathable atmosphere, drinkable water: this sucker's got the lot

TOM: Pluto. Although I never understood why he had to live in a kennel and Goofy got to have a mortgage

EMMA: Venus. Pretty good at tennis, for a celestial body without any discernable limbs

MATTHEW: Mars. Soft and creamy. What? Shut up, this is my magazine

OXM'S PGA TOUR HANDICAP

ROB: Eagle

EMMA: Birdie

JOE: Goosey

ALEX: Bogey

TOM: Turdie

MATTHEW: (That's enough golf handicaps - Ed)

12 MILES

The distance that an elephant can smell. With that, you'd think 6/10 Tembo could smell his own stench.

THIS MONTH WE...



Went out clubbing p64



Cloned ourselves p66



Got nostalgic over Dante p68



Followed false generals p70



Froze to death p74

REVIEW

Most of your time will be spent peacefully drifting between star systems, but when a fight breaks out, it's like being in the thick of the best *Star Wars* space battle ever.





PUBLISHER FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS / **DEVELOPER** FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS
FORMAT XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW

ELITE: DANGEROUS

An epic space RPG on a truly galactic scale

At the start of *Elite: Dangerous*, you're nothing. You have 100k of credits in your bank account and a Sidewinder spaceship. From these humble beginnings, your goal is to become Elite: the highest rank given to pilots in the fields of combat, exploration and trade.

The exciting thing is, how you get there is completely up to you. Your journey from space-rags to space-riches is shaped entirely by you, at your own pace, and will be different to the thousands of others who inhabit this evolving, connected and massive replica of the Milky Way.

If you want to make an honest buck, you can, but if you want something a little more exciting (and illegal), there's plenty of work out there for pirates, smugglers and bounty hunters. Open-world games often make lofty, but ultimately hollow, claims about playing your own way – but here it's totally possible.

New pilots start their careers in a backwater station in Federation space. This tiny corner of the galaxy is densely populated by humans, and a great place to start making money. Your Sidewinder is a decent all-rounder, but a small cargo hold and puny weapons mean you'll start by doing the starship commander's equivalent of odd jobs – delivering fish to a neighboring system or mining asteroids.

But hard work is rewarded with credits, and soon you'll be able to afford a new ship. This is where *Elite: Dangerous* really begins. You can sell your Sidewinder and buy a Hauler, a ship that makes up for what it lacks in firepower with a fat cargo hold. This will let you start

buying goods from one station and then selling them on at an inflated price.

Or maybe you'll upgrade to an Eagle, a ship with an equally tiny hold, but which is much better at holding its own in combat. The Hauler's a bulky space-truck, but the Eagle's a tough little fighter that you can fit with missile launchers and lasers. This will give you the power to hunt down wanted criminals and claim the price on their head.

Above all, it's money that keeps the galaxy spinning, and – much like in real life – the amount you have dictates how exciting your life will be. When you've grafted enough to earn large amounts of cash, you can buy even more specialized, and powerful, ships.

Exploration is a lucrative career path, and one of the most fun. There are 400 billion individual star systems in the game, and most of them have never been seen by another soul. In fact, if you're the first person to discover and scan a system, your name will be etched forever on the galaxy map. But even if someone has already found it, you can still scan the planets and stars

there and sell the data back to stations.

Exploration is also the best way to soak in the game's haunting atmosphere. You'll see fiery suns a hundred times larger

than our own, and planets circled by enormous rings of ice and rock, thousands of miles across. You'll encounter black holes, which twist and distort the stars around them, and space stations spinning in orbit around Earth-like worlds.

A ship such as the Asp is perfect for explorers, with a long jump range that lets them cover greater distances. But it can handle itself in a fight too, with thick



REVIEWER

ANDY KELLY

Live ultrabright
@ultrabright

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A space role-player set in an utterly huge, freely explorable galaxy.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A great game with awesome space combat and loads of potential.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who love freedom and huge open worlds.

**XBOX
GAME
PREVIEW**

The interiors of stations reflect the wealth of the owners – this is the result of a strong economy.



armor and a variety of hardpoints to attach weapons to. Eventually earning enough credits to buy powerful, multi-use ships like this lets you dabble in a lot of different play styles at once.

Other ships available include the Orca, a luxury space-yacht that will be a glinting prize to passing pirates, and the Anaconda, a floating battle platform that's the most formidable – and expensive – craft in the game. There's a ship for everyone, whether you're low on cash or loaded.

The one thing every ship has in common is that they all feel fantastic to fly, with their own distinct handling and personalities. There's a great feeling of weight as you accelerate and turn, giving you a very real sensation of being strapped into a rocket-propelled hunk of metal. You hear the engines

spin and groan as you go faster, and the creak of the chassis as you shift into a hyperjump. You spend the whole game in your chosen ship's cockpit, and the more you play, the more it feels like an extension of you.

Ships such as the Eagle feel light and nimble, while the hulking Lakon Type-9 Heavy is ungainly and challenging to squeeze through the narrow docking slots of stations without scraping the paintwork. As much love has gone into the tiniest details of the ship simulation as the grand scale of the galaxy. And it really is a simulation. You can manage the power of your systems – pumping more power into weapons to let you fire them for longer, for example – and every part of your ship can be controlled, from the landing gear to the lights. Your first

Everywhere you go in the Milky Way there's some amazing scenery to gawp at.

attempt at docking will undoubtedly be a disaster as you forget to switch on the landing gear and crash headfirst into the landing pad, but you get steadily better, and a smooth landing is one of the game's greatest joys. The way these deep, complex controls are mapped to the Xbox pad – using held buttons to reach a hidden layer of menus – is a porting triumph.

Star wars

If the idea of being a galactic drifter, picking up whatever job comes along, doesn't appeal, you can always fight in a war that's perpetually raging in a small corner of the galaxy. Ten powers are fighting for control, and you can join them to help their cause.

The community's actions alter the landscape of the galaxy, with star systems constantly changing hands. The benefits include extra credits, access to special weapons and unique ships. The downside is that pilots from other factions can attack with impunity if you stray into their territory. But, true to *Elite's* dedication to freedom, neutral players can take advantage, too. As systems are plunged into war, supply and demand for food and weapons are dramatically affected: great for traders.

Homeward bound

You can travel to our own solar system, Sol, if you have a special permit. Making a pilgrimage to Earth is something every *Elite: Dangerous* player should do at least once. And you can visit other cosmic tourist hotspots, too – including the rings of Saturn, terraformed Mars and the Moon.



Equip your ship with a mining laser and you'll be able to extract precious minerals from ring worlds like this.



"There's a real sensation of being in a rocket-propelled hunk of metal"

Elite's biggest problem is repetition. Missions are randomly generated, and it shows. You never feel like you're doing anything of importance and the mission text is meaningless. You end up not caring what you're delivering or who you're hunting because it's really just about earning credits. You'll also get to the point where money doesn't really matter and you don't want to fight in the war, which is when the boredom sets in.

But then you'll discover a system bathed in the fluorescent blue of a nebula, or get into a knife-edge

dogfight with a much bigger ship and win, and you'll be drawn back in. *Elite* is a game where you'll do something different every time you play, and boredom is never permanent. Even just flying around, checking out the scenery and visiting space stations, is enjoyable. Only the occasional game crash disrupts the mood, but then the purpose of Game Preview is to iron out such kinks.

You can play solo, but open play – where others share the galaxy with you – is the best experience. You'll form uneasy alliances with strangers and

Dogfights benefit from spectacular space vistas. Would being ejected into this really be that bad?

make enemies as you explore. Or, to even the odds, you can call in friends and form a Wing, allowing you to share credits. Unlike fellow Game Preview, *The Long Dark*, *Elite* is far closer to its 'final' form – what you get here can be bought on PC as a finished retail game. If anything, it's great value for \$30.99.

The really impressive thing is that *Elite: Dangerous* is being constantly updated. You can buy it now, but it's far from finished. Frontier has big plans, including the ability to land on planets and board other players' ships. So in a year, this review might be worthless. But even at this early stage it's a totally unique experience on Xbox, and one of the best open-world RPGs on any platform. With some more improvements and new ways to play, it could become a classic. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PRO TIP



If you have illegal cargo, switch to silent running while docking to avoid the police.

THE BEST BIT



Finally earning enough credits to sell your current rust bucket and buy a shiny beast.

DID YOU KNOW?

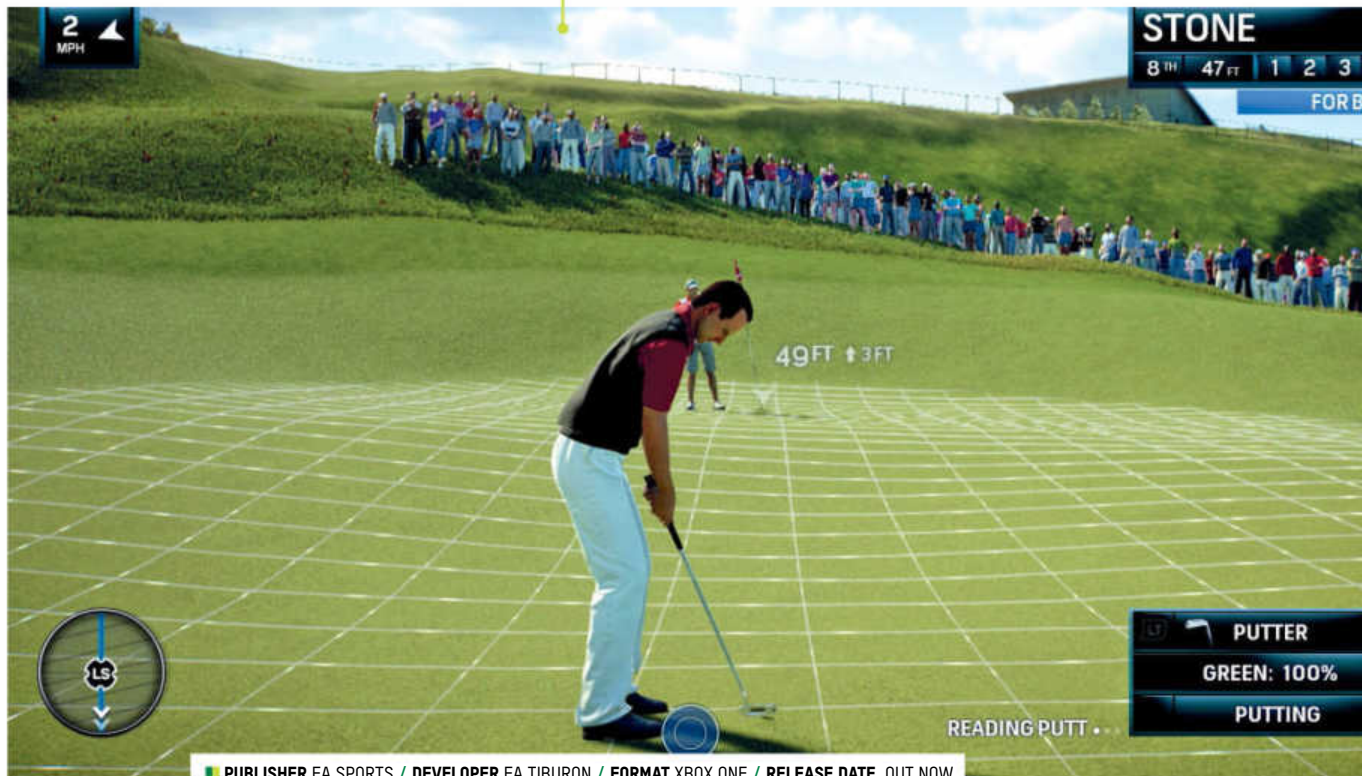
Elite: Dangerous was funded on Kickstarter. Over 25,000 backers contributed a grand total of £1,578,316.

OVERALL

Elite: Dangerous is a thrilling space RPG offering an unprecedented amount of freedom. There's a lot it could do better, but there's nothing else quite like it – or as huge – on Xbox.

XBOX
GAME
PREVIEW

Didn't get a screen of our hole-in-one. Besides, you'd only accuse us of lying. Accurately.



PUBLISHER EA SPORTS / DEVELOPER EA TIBURON / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

TOM STONE

Live OXM Tom Stone
@TheTomStrange

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Xbox One debut of the excellent *PGA Tour* golf sims.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

PGA Tour 14, but with a new star and less stuff.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Newcomers, who don't mind less content in exchange for shorter loading times.

RORY MCILROY PGA TOUR

Still a great golf game, but where's the rest of it?

Some say golf is a good walk spoiled. We personally consider a good walk a tedious, healthy chore. At least golf lets us stop that walk 18 times to vent our frustrations by hitting something with a club. The *PGA Tour* games have always been cursed with their own form of virtual 'walking' – loading times. Enter *Rory McIlroy PGA Tour*, which proudly promises no hole-to-hole load times. We'd be more impressed if it hadn't come at the cost of a lot of features that made this series great.

Gameplay will be familiar to anyone who's played previous *PGA Tour* games. Classic mode reduces striking the ball

to a few button presses, and feels like a relic from a bygone era. If you actually want to feel like you're swinging the club, you'll want Arcade or Pro mode. Arcade has you pulling the analog stick back to lift your club and then down to swing, ideally as straight as possible if you don't want a close up of the bunker.

Arcade mode also gives you the power to spin the ball, dictating which way it'll roll, and you can zoom in to see where you're likely to land, helping you judge your shots. It's not simply a matter of just choosing where the ball goes and then hitting the win button. You have to judge wind, how the ball is likely to bounce, make sure your swing

is swift, as well as straight, and avoid trees, bunkers and bludgeoning the skulls of anyone in the crowd.

Purists might balk at ball spin and zoomed-in views, but things are difficult no matter what playstyle you opt for. For the first few hours, it's like playing the toughest, most unforgiving RPG ever. You level up throughout the main tour, with each hole completed giving experience depending on how impressive your shots were. This upgrades skills such as drive distance, putting and the like, but until you've leveled up a few times, and learned from a lot of failure, your drive will constantly be too short, your ball will consistently find the rough and putting feels like it's been imported straight from hell.

Putting guides appear on the green on Arcade and Classic, but early success is so slim they'll feel sarcastic. It'll be a few hours of trial and error until you're reading them properly. Once you have it down, it's one of the most rewarding systems we've seen in any sports game.

Only when you've mastered Arcade do we recommend adjusting to Pro.



War Course

The fantasy courses are fun, including a bizarre *Battlefield 4* one (which sounds like the most misguided crossover since some goon decided to pitch *Family Guy* meets *The Simpsons*). They're well designed, but it didn't stop us noticing that there were far fewer courses than the last *PGA Tour* game.

Nightclub mode has this delightful old dude. His outfit should've been a pre-order bonus.

REVIEW



“Write about what’s new? Sadly, that’s not going to take long”

This takes away the putting guides, zoomed-in shot previews and ball spinning, but gives you more control on curving your shots. More realistic and insanely difficult, it’s a great step forward for any virtual golfer. Series veterans might be wondering when we’re going to talk about what’s new. Sadly, that’s not going to take long.

Graphical rough

PGA Tour uses the Frostbite engine to load whole courses, meaning no loading times between holes. But much as we detest loading times, we understand why they’re a necessary evil. Now pop-in and graphical glitches

are common, far more so than in recent entries. Player animation and the courses often look fantastic, but it’s disappointing to see an Xbox One game suffering from glitches we stopped accepting generations ago.

Too much is missing. Creating your golfer used to boast ridiculously deep customization options. Now, you have to settle for a small amount of set faces and hairstyles. It’s also surprisingly restrictive on how your golfer progresses. Each time you level up, the stat that gets a boost is decided for you, depending on how you’ve been playing.

New mode, Nightclub, features fun mini-games that have you hitting targets

Note to self: fire this chump and get a less cheery caddy.

and score rings to music far too trendy for a golf sim. You’re helped by ridiculous boosts, like a power up that makes the ball leap back into the air mid-flight or stick wherever it lands without bouncing into another damn bunker.

Fun as this new diversion is, it doesn’t make up for other compromises. The excellent Legends mode – where you played through some of the most iconic matches in golfing history – is gone. *PGA Tour 14*’s welcome introduction of the LGPA – the first time a women’s-only career mode was featured in a *PGA Tour* game – is also gone, with just two (fantasy) female characters this year. Online multiplayer allowed up to 24 people last time, here it’s capped at four.

Fans might wonder why they should accept all these missing features. Newcomers will be impressed by the lack of loading screens, but those who’ve played *PGA Tour 14* will never crave Xbox 360 backwards compatibility more. **OXM**

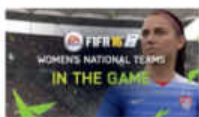
The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Just look at it go! Pulling off a power shot never gets old.

THE WORST BIT



Finally, female players in FIFA! So where have all the *PGA Tour* ones gone?

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

? At least one new course will drop as DLC. Hopefully it’ll become a more substantial package in the coming months.

OVERALL

Plays as great a game of golf as ever. But with previous titles boasting so much more content, it’s hard to justify shelling out for an Xbox One start that feels like a step backwards.

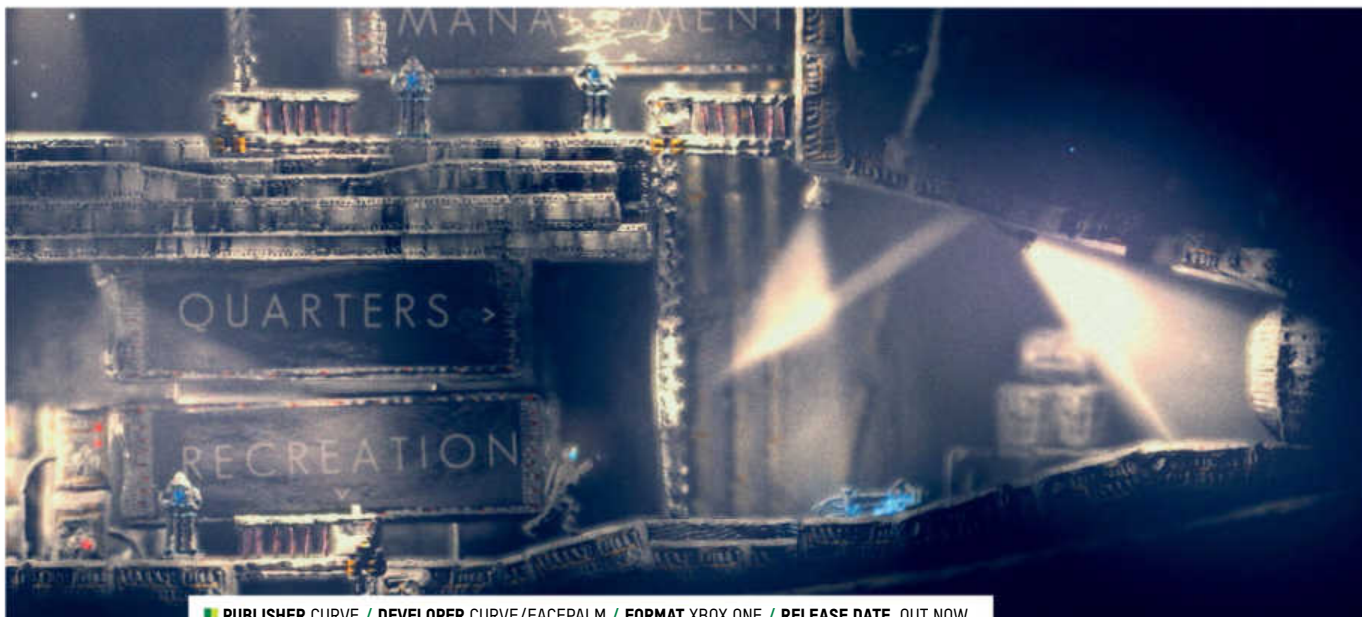
6

REVIEW

Its old-school aesthetic is reminiscent of a time when making horror movies involved releasing bunnies into model villages.



The Swapper's like a portable Easy Bake Oven – one batch of clones gets fried, another batch pops out.



PUBLISHER CURVE / DEVELOPER CURVE/FACEPALM / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

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Live Private

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THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A *Portal*-esque 2D platformer that questions what it means to exist.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Solving puzzles with a cloning device while pondering what it means to have a soul.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Brainiacs who believe fun and logic can be compatible.

THE SWAPPER

If a clone falls in a space station does it make a sound?

As a scavenger stranded in an abandoned research station, your objectives are as follows: find out what happened to the crew, and escape. You've essentially crashed a party long after the main event, but just in time to clean up the mess. Your only real friend is The Swapper, which allows you to create clones of yourself.

You can make up to four duplicates – not enough for a field hockey team, but enough to explore a space labyrinth. They can be used to press buttons, move blocks, and access out-of-reach places via soul transfer. Be warned though, accidents happen – materializing your first clone over a drop only to watch it

crumple like a candy wrapper causes you to question the moral and practical implications of swapping – and as the puzzles get harder, sacrificing clones becomes standard practice.

Real difficulties arise as new obstacles start to emerge, like zero-gravity areas, asteroid belts, and neon lights that fry clones on the spot. In order to minimize frustration you have to plan ahead, because every clone copies your movements exactly and you can't undo them at the click of a button. If you prefer an experimental approach, you just rinse and repeat.

This might be a straightforward platformer with a clear-cut concept, but its intricate environments set

it apart. From the overgrown space garden to the communal lounge, every background is in fact a photo of a hand-crafted clay model. Exploring areas reveals ever more unsettling scraps of info in the form of memos and fuzzy telepathic comments – space rocks sure like cryptic one-liners.

Gradually unveiling the truth, always feeling that the more you discover the less you want to know, *The Swapper* ultimately forces you to make a Shakespeare-worthy choice: to swap or not to swap? With an atmosphere you can taste, a philosophical storyline, and roomfuls of unique puzzles, this is a thought-provoking indie gem set within a unique sci-fi world. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

✓ Endlessly inventive clone puzzles
✓ Bleak humor in clone murder
✓ Lumpy clay props add to creepiness

✗ Not the jolliest of games you're ever likely to play
✗ Self-murders may haunt you
✗ Occasionally fiddly controls

KEY INFLUENCES



40% *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*
40% *Dolly the sheep*
20% *The Prestige*

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

An atmospheric 2D platformer with a unique sci-fi setting, challenging puzzles, and a storyline that takes you on a philosophical voyage. One of the best indie titles since *Limbo*.



Barrelling through goons while letters tumble out of your ass is great fun, but rarely happens.



PUBLISHER SEGA / DEVELOPER GAME FREAK / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

TOM STONE

Live OXM Tom Stone
@TheTomStrange

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Unashamedly old-fashioned platformer, almost saved by a wonderful lead elephant.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Late-'90s 2D platformers, sometimes for better, too often for worse.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Those who've accepted this'll be the closest they come to being badass. Tragic.

TEMBO THE BADASS ELEPHANT

Didn't pack enough new ideas in its trunk

Elephants never forget. If only we were blessed with such gifts, as we've just finished *Tembo* and are already struggling to remember it. It's a forgettable retro platformer that occasionally rockets along on destructive charm, but has no new ideas of its own. Apart from the odd rubbish one.

That's not the fault of its hero. Tembo is a war vet who won us over from the moment he arrived with an almighty roar from his face trumpet. He's a joy to play, whether smash dashing through houses, or morphing his trunk into a hammer to strike enemies. Our favorite touch is his habit of plonking rescued civilians on his back, where they'll cheer him on for the rest of the level.

Shame the inspired design stops with the lead character. Tembo's best at high speeds, either smashing through levels or dashing through thrilling chase sequences. But these have to share screen time with combat areas and fussier platforming, making the *Sonic the Hedgehog* mistake of trapping a speedy hero in a slow game. Tembo's one 'unique' idea, his ability to shoot water from his trunk, forces you to stop dashing and endure fiddly aiming. Putting out flames is awkward enough to control when you're stationary – good luck pulling it off in motion.

Even if you try dashing through levels, the game won't let you proceed unless you've killed a certain number of enemies. It's a lazy way to pad out

a short game. As are later stages, which have screens packed with enemies, and tedious, oft-repeated mini-bosses.

Harsh design makes it hard to see who *Tembo* is for. The lovely cartoon style implies a game aimed at children. But the arbitrary difficulty means the only child we'd recommend this to is Damien from *The Omen*. Checkpoints are infrequent and extra lives require finding 300 peanuts (three times more than the average platformer). Levels are long, and having to restart them after running out of lives makes it hard to want to keep playing. If you force a child to complete *Tembo*, be warned that you might be grooming them towards a future in poaching. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

BETTER THAN...



REAL ELEPHANTS

We did some research and actual elephants apparently almost never rescue people, butt-stomp tanks or help the military save the world. These hacks have nothing on Tembo.

WORSE THAN...



RAYMAN LEGENDS

Musical levels, incredible design and it does away with the outdated lives system altogether. Still the best platformer on Xbox One, if not the best 2D platformer ever.

DID YOU KNOW?

? Elephants are one of the few mammals who can't jump. Natural choice for your platforming hero, then...

OVERALL

At worst frustrating, usually just reminiscent of better, more innovative platformers. We respect our war veterans here; we wish Game Freak had done the same by putting Tembo in a better game.

6

This flaming demon doesn't know how to stop, drop and roll. Teach him a lesson by hitting him with your sword. Safety first.

REVIEW



PUBLISHER CAPCOM / DEVELOPER CAPCOM / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

JOHN ROBERTSON

Live Lollipop Gun

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THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A re-release of the 2008 original, featuring new playable characters.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Once the novelty passes, much the same as seven years ago.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone that enjoys action games served with a dollop of cheesy one-liners.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4: SPECIAL EDITION

Sparda Wars: Return of the Devil

Forget the revamped visual fidelity, improved framerates and flashy extras. The big question that surrounds any re-release and/or remaster is: does the core game still hold up today? Given that the seven years since *Devil May Cry 4*'s release has seen its fair share of stunningly executed action games, the question is particularly poignant in this instance. Action, both the genre and the concept, is, after all, fast-moving and constantly evolving.

Said action may not have the sophistication of *Bayonetta*, or the razzle-dazzle of *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, but it does provide a spectacle in its own right. Playing

through again what was at the time a gem among its peer group reminds you that the series' pre-*DmC* reboot offered fans of combat and (very) light exploration an experience that is at times exceptional, so long as you're prepared to put the work in.

It would be remiss to pretend this is one of those experiences that immediately draws you in. It doesn't. Much of this disappointment comes down to *DMC4*'s new protagonist, Nero; a young upstart lacking in the areas of charming narcissism and delightful self-confidence that Dante does so well. Nero ticks both the narcissistic and self-confident boxes, but he is neither charming nor delightful.

Once the Nero/Dante story reaches its second half, however, and you're finally given control of the latter, things take a decidedly improved turn. Not only are you back at the reins of a character that you actually want to see succeed, but it's at this point the core systems start to click back into place. Enemies' patterns become familiar enough that you can string long, uninterrupted combos together.

Additionally, vitally, the abilities at your fingertips have moved past the initially lackluster offering of the first few hours to become something altogether more flexible and open-ended, further facilitating violent self-expression and sowing the seed for replaying the entire thing again on a tougher difficulty setting.

It's during these moments that you can't help but mourn the modern loss of this 'original' Dante. As camp, playful and blasé as they come, he alone is reason enough to step back into this world of giant demons and gothic architecture, allowing us some down time from the 'why so serious?' attitude of the bulk of current games.



Dark Knight

If you're coming at this special edition from the perspective of a *Devil May Cry* pro, then you owe it to yourself to opt immediately for the Legendary Dark Knight difficulty setting. It's open from the start, so you've no excuse for at least trying to overcome its quite frankly ridiculous, merciless challenge.

Your mastery of the combat system is judged by how many 'stylish points' you rack up.



REVIEW



Trish's speed makes her one of the more instantly engaging character options - pretty much any combo makes you look like a pro.

"The Dante on offer here is as camp, playful and blasé as they come"

You're not confined to playing as Nero and Dante here, though. There are three other optional characters, each bringing a new combat style. Vergil is cut from the same demon-cloth as Dante and is a dab hand with a samurai sword, his true value coming in the form of staying out of trouble until the chance to counter arises. At which point a well-timed strike can deal a giddy amount of damage.

The entire campaign can be tackled in isolation as Vergil, but the other two newcomers, Lady and Trish, come as a pair akin to Nero and Dante, effectively providing three character options with which to tackle the campaign. These two are the epitome of yin and yang

game design; one focused on agility, the other on force.

Trish excels in closing distance quickly, unleashing a volley of strikes and then backing off before giving her target a chance to retaliate. A hit and run affair in which mastery of jumps, dodges and standard movement speed is of paramount importance. Given her fondness for bazookas and grenades, Lady is concerned with dealing heavy damage from as far away as possible. She does sport the option of launching melee attacks, but the less said about their effectiveness the better.

Given that any of the three options has the tendency to get repetitive, hopping across each of the character

Playing as the original Dante once again does revive your nostalgia.

options is possibly the best way of playing. This runs the risk of you losing the flow of each moveset, but the potential for tedium is removed.

No matter which way you play, there can be no cause for complaint when it comes to volume of options and the quality of construction. Everything runs smoothly, and while the visuals applied to characters and environment do appear dated, the upgrade allowed by Xbox One's hefty guts has worked wonders for the animation clarity. In turn, that makes those long combos all the more satisfying.

Definitely not a game for everyone, then, but if you're craving an approach to action that has largely fallen by the wayside in recent years then you'll not be disappointed. If you do take the plunge, make sure you give yourself a weekend to truly engage with its systems - it's an investment that will stand you in great stead to appreciate it for weeks to come. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

BETTER THAN...



NINJA GAIDEN 3
Another hack and slash series from Japan whose glory years are rooted in the early noughties. Unfortunately, when Tomonobu Itagaki left the series, so did the finesse.

WORSE THAN...



BAYONETTA
While *DMC4* has the same over-the-top approach to story and character, it's the unrivaled quality of *Bayonetta's* combat that continues to elevate it above the competition.

COMPLETION
CLOCK

30
HOURS

OVERALL

A commendably well crafted re-release that doesn't rest on its laurels. It's not perfect, but what's served up here does cause you to crave modern experiences of this kind.

8

Events such as these are ones where it pays to have a seasoned general in charge, rather than some ballsy stranger. Oh well!



THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE: TAMRIEL UNLIMITED

ZeniMax wraps Skyrim's UI around an MMO. Worth the strain?

This review is written in memory of 'StefanLemon', the unsung fallen hero of Tamriel. We ran into the man while doing our bit for the Aldmeri Dominion in Cyrodiil – hitherto the setting for Xbox 360's acclaimed *The Elder*

Scrolls IV: Oblivion, now home to the arresting PvP component of an intricately imagined but deeply conflicted MMO.

Accessible at any time via the inventory screen after you hit Level 10, Cyrodiil is where *TESO*'s three multi-species alliances – Daggerfall Covenant, Ebonheart Pact and our beloved Dominion – come together to engage in week-long spats over territory. This boils down to four kinds of mission, which are offered by NPCs at each side's main base: the vanilla kill-X-of-this-variety, missions where you scout out farms and mines that are protected by tooled-up AI characters, assaults on the castles that house spawn and fast-travel points, and missions where you fight for ownership of an Elder Scroll and the associated Alliance-wide stat buffs.

The framework creates a stronger team ethic than many MMOs – slaughtering six Orc bravos in as many seconds won't help if the nearest castle falls, denying your Alliance a vital shortcut ahead of an attack on a temple's Scroll. The strategic aspect is never forced on you, however, and those who can't be bothered to join a guild or matchmake with nearby teams can participate in the war fairly easily, by latching onto any player who looks like they're heading somewhere important.

In this way, hasty lone adventurers commonly find themselves leading a disorderly swarm of people in putrid medieval bling, all riding make-believe

steeds and dogged by fantasy pets. We met StefanLemon at the head of one such aimless army, and were struck by his unique approach to generalship. It consisted of running up to foes and declaring, "We're not going to kill you," whereupon everybody behind would triumphantly loose all their spells and

abilities at once, swamping the bewildered target in firestorms and poison. This bizarre tactic won our gallant leader many allies despite his modest rank (level gaps are erased in PvP, but higher ranks obviously tend to indicate a knack for leadership). It proved less than effective, however, when we found ourselves in the vicinity of an enemy fortress. Say what you like about reverse psychology, but it doesn't offer much protection against trebuchets.

Why have we just spent paragraphs telling you about some stranger in PvP? Well, to be frank, of all our adventures in Tamriel, this wayward yet colorful encounter sticks out the most in hindsight – not least because it represents the part of the experience where the networked environment and the fiction are more or less aligned. Its winningly unconventional competitive multiplayer aside, this is a game in search of an identity, straddling genres in a way that dissatisfies whether you approach it as another *Elder Scrolls* epic or a real-time MMO.

The trick to enjoying the non-PvP portion of the game, overall, is to forgive it for not being *Skyrim*. This is difficult, because *The Elder Scrolls Online* really, really wants to be *Skyrim*. Its interface, handling and world design are in key respects identical. There's the same spongy yet serviceable melee combat and the same slightly ungainly capped inventory, with items such as potions, »



REVIEWER

EDWIN EVANS-THIRLWELL

Live [dirigiblebill](#)
[@dirigiblebill](#)

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A subscription-less massively multiplayer role-playing game with talking cats.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A playground for all the Chosen Ones left over from previous *Elder Scrolls* games.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Scrolls buffs and fans of big but slightly insipid RPGs.



Away with you, butt-thrusting ghost! Back to the shadows! Seriously, there are children present.



enchantment glyphs or craftable resources smeared unintuitively across drop-down menus. Quests are built around the familiar rhythms of fetching artifacts, carrying messages and carving holes in ne'er-do-wells. There's much more in the way of hotkeys for spells and abilities, but the pace of battle is the same: slash, strafe, ability, slash, healing item, block, slash.

It's often easy to forget that you're playing an online game, particularly when you stumble out of one of Tamriel's many cavemouths to find a valley at your feet, glistening faintly in the morning sun. The game certainly lives up to its subtitle when it comes to the environments, which span both familiar areas and regions we've never visited – expect islands covered with tumbledown Khajiit temples, mountains honeycombed with sunken Dwemer

installations, and frequent expeditions to the planes of Oblivion. At times there's the same sense of awe you may have felt while scaling the Throat of the World, as lighting and weather effects flow together to hide the limitations of Zenimax Online's midrange graphics technology, and cunning layouts hint at peril and treasure just out of view.

But then you notice discrepancies. The absence of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*'s nuanced object physics, for example. The relative aridity of the landscapes, with fewer evocative jumbles of architecture to distract you. And of course, the omnipresence of other players, all jogging around and through each other on their separate, yet awkwardly conflated adventures.

The Elder Scrolls Online's critical flaw is that it fails to reconcile the thrust of its narrative, in which you play yet

Most towns offer a full slate of crafting stations. No, there's no need to queue.

another Chosen One out to save the universe from demon invaders, with the fact that half the people you meet have also been chosen to carry out exactly the same end. The plot and multiplayer elements merely squat side by side, refusing to acknowledge each other, and the result is that none of the epic moments feel truly yours to savor.

Dungeon disaster

This is most painful when it comes to dungeons. The majority of the game's quests can be played solo, but the majority of those we've sampled also take place in public zones, which leads to the farcical spectacle of bosses who expire at the hands of one player only to resurrect before your eyes as the next hero approaches.

Special rewards are handed out by NPCs in dialogue upon quest completion, so you at least don't have to worry about latecomers filching that rare Axe of Burnination once you've knocked down a Daedric prince. But no amount of axes can make up for the repeat revelation that what's presented as a private odyssey is, in fact, a public commute. It feels like the game was drawn up as a single-player outing, then converted overnight into an MMO at the behest of shadowy executives.



Space out

If you have one priority, make it expanding your inventory. Anybody looking to do lots of crafting or cooking will quickly fill up the starting 60-item limit. You can buy measly 10-item upgrades at vendors, or store goods in a bank where characters from other savegames can access them.

As ever faces animate like the scum on a boiling Cup-a-Soup. Nice lighting, though.

REVIEW



"Bosses expire, only to resurrect before your eyes for another player"

Overcoming the disappointment all this breeds takes a good few hours, but there's much to enjoy here if you manage the feat. *The Elder Scrolls Online* is one of 2015's most generously proportioned RPGs. The world might be less characterful than those of its predecessors, but it's just as saturated with activities and utterly unbothered about the order in which you undertake them. The main story is high-falutin' fantasy fluff, and there's the customary Bethesda-brand voice-acting to wince at, but the script does manage to cook up moments of wit and pathos.

Mostly, though, you'll persist for the sake of the skilltrees. There are an absurd quantity – three per class to start with, plus one for each weapon type, and countless others unlocked by joining certain factions, speaking to certain people or participating in PvP. The result is a daunting spread of possible loadouts, with no restraints on weapons or abilities save your level.

In the long run, this spread of opportunities outweighs the deflation you may feel at cracking the lid on a long-forgotten mausoleum, heart in mouth, only to encounter six other

Siege weapons are bought in Cyrodiil and deployed like those pop-up tents at music festivals.

players galloping in the opposite direction. Add in the impressively unusual head-to-head multiplayer and the workmanlike quest design, and *Tamriel Unlimited* manages to be a worthwhile purchase. Reaching that point of reconciliation takes real effort, however, and the feeling that an opportunity has been missed refuses to vanish entirely.

The Elder Scrolls Online isn't so much a game you master as one you learn to live with. It's an exercise in endurance, like edging a battering ram closer to a castle gate while ballista bolts stab the earth nearby. There's a rewarding RPG to discover beneath its tortured surface, but we suspect that unearthing it will take more patience than many players can muster. To those who can – we'll see you in Cyrodiil. Watch out for the trebuchets. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

KEY INFLUENCES



60% *Skyrim*
30% *Ride of the Valkyries*
10% Benny Hill music

BETTER THAN...



DEFIANCE
Trion Worlds' 2013 TV/game crossover MMO offers more in the way of public events, but is severely let down by its unexciting world and quest design.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

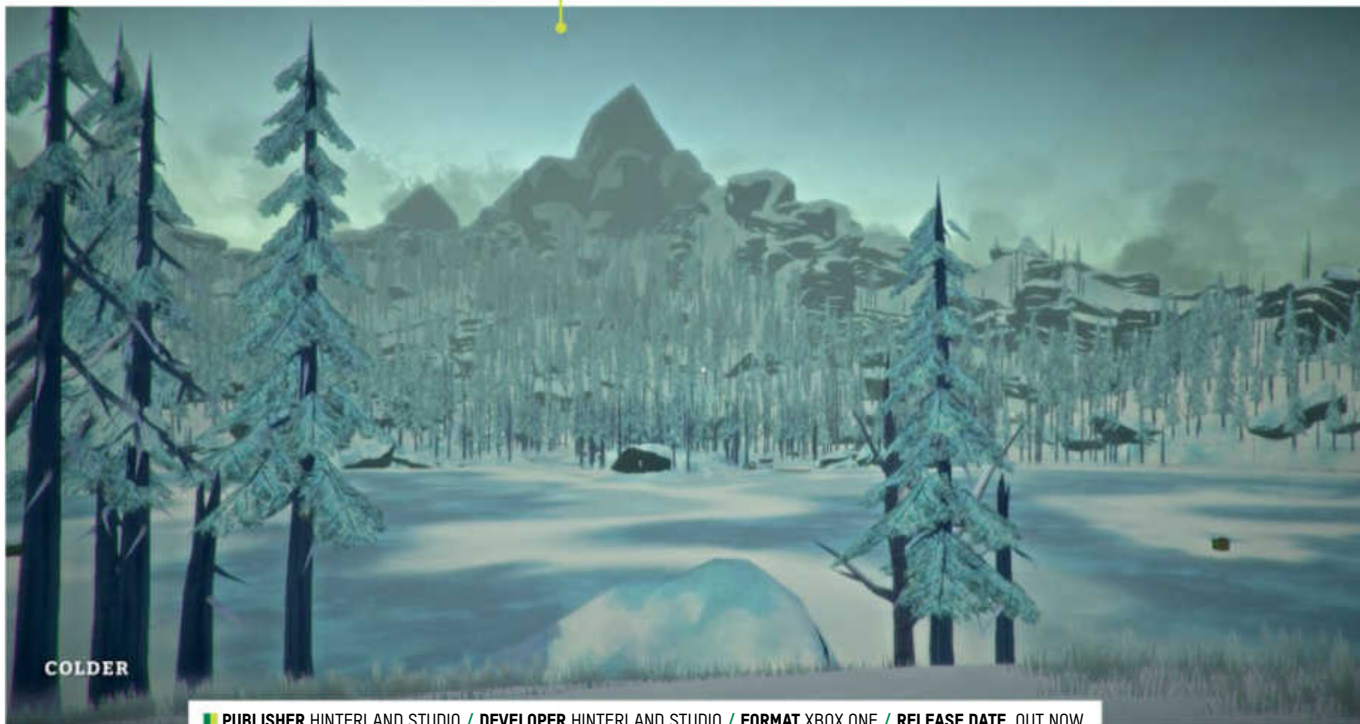
? Cyrodiil's demon-haunted Imperial City and Orc stomping ground Orsinium will eventually come as DLC.

OVERALL

Vast, occasionally beautiful and absolutely loaded with things to do, but rarely as magical as the numbered *Scrolls* games. Survive the first few hours and it's a memorable adventure.



Couldn't find the axe. Looks like we're taking this tree down with our teeth, then.



PUBLISHER HINTERLAND STUDIO / DEVELOPER HINTERLAND STUDIO / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

TOM STONE

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THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Brutal but rewarding survival adventure, set in the Canadian wilderness.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Walking in the forest, then realizing you forgot to leave a trail of breadcrumbs.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Explorers, fans of survival games, homesick Canadians.

THE LONG DARK

Survival of the fittest. Oh, and us

We should never have left the house. But who can blame us when the great outdoors looks so, well, great? Painted in a cel-shaded style, *The Long Dark*'s isolated mountains remind us of Telltale's *The Wolf Among Us*. Little details - the smoke on the horizon, or beams of cool moonlight - impress, while happening upon a shimmering waterfall has you hankering for the next surprise. But who would think somewhere so pretty would want us so dead?

In its lone sandbox mode (episodic story is due in a later update), you're free to explore, the only goal being to stay alive as long as possible. Fatigue, hunger, thirst and cold all are slowly

rising. Let one go into the red, and your health will fall. At first you're not too worried: it's a bright, beautiful day and status bars seem easy to track. We planned to just trek across the wilderness until we were loaded down with stolen resources, then take a nap in a warm cabin. *The Long Dark*? They should have called it *The Relaxing Winter Holiday*.

Then you get lost. Really lost. There's no map screen, and while there are visual hints as to which routes will lead somewhere, they're easy to miss. You're alone, too, with only the occasional frozen corpse for company. It's often silent, and the sounds you do hear only make the sense of isolation run deeper. As your journey

becomes a mess of backtracking, the tree clusters all start to look alike. It's *The Blair Witch Project: The Game*, except with more wolves and less snot.

Alas, wolves are the least of your worries. Let night fall when you're far from shelter and *The Long Dark* stops being a survival game and morphs into a dark survival horror. It's near-impossible to see anything and the cold gets unbearable, turning blood to ice. You're left to freeze, punished for not planning ahead. When night finally passes, the sunrise has never looked sweeter, though you'll probably watch it from a body bag. Die and it's game over. No option to reload. Dead is dead.

With death a real, tangible threat, you have to play smart to survive. You can carry a fair amount of supplies, but naturally never as much as you'd like, forcing careful rationing. Found food is in finite supply, so you'll have to learn to hunt and fish. Then you'll have to cook the spoils. Then weep into your braised leg of deer when you see how much precious inventory space it eats up. None of these ideas are given

XBOX
GAME
PREVIEW



What was that?

Footsteps that you're pretty sure aren't yours. Unsettling noises in houses you search. The creaking of a wooden bridge you have to cross. Ice cracking beneath your feet and a wolf howling in the distance. The excellent use of sound has your nerves on edge, and makes the world feel truly alive.

Frozen corpses didn't boost our confidence of survival. Thanks for letting us nick the supplies, though, guys!

REVIEW



"Sunrise has never looked sweeter, but you'll watch it from a body bag"

discrete tutorials, but it's intuitive enough that common sense leads to success – and you'll feel more like a survivor for it. You have very human limitations.

You can't jump and you definitely can't fall, unless you want to break a few bones. Less realistically, wolves will attack whenever they see you. They're rare, though, so it feels like an event. An intense, nerve-wracking event we wish we'd RSVP'd 'never in a million years' to. At one point we were sure one had spotted us. No cabins nearby, no weapons on us and no way we could outrun it. Then a squirrel darted past us, and we ducked behind a tree as the wolf sprinted after it. We ran and never looked back. Exploiting the food chain for your own survival is where *The Long*

Dark really sank its hooks into us. We'll take those over wolf teeth any day.

Excitement cools whenever the action moves inside. Searching abandoned shelters for supplies is essential but tedious. At this stage of development interiors are nothing but loot crates, with no flavor text or differing designs – simply a chance to stock up and take a quick nap. Searching anything involves watching a small bar load, which quickly gets irritating when you have a whole kitchen of drawers and cupboards to scavenge through. Ransacking one hut now and again isn't so bad, but a cluster elicits groans – kind of a perverse in a game where every glimpse of civilization should be a glorious life raft. If *Hinterland* was

Don't have a Lara Croft-y cry when you shoot a deer – your tears will freeze.

trying to encourage us to spend more time outdoors by making being inside extra dull, it certainly worked.

That said, even with only the basic skeleton, we're sold on *The Long Dark*. After a few deaths you start to learn the locations of buildings, pathways and no-go zones from memory. It's tough, often frustrating – particularly for a generation of gamers raised on magical maps that pinpoint your exact location – but it's key to survival. You slowly learn where everything lies in relation to everything else and start seeing why real explorers do this. Our main concern is that once it's explored there'll be little reason to keep playing. The quest to survive isn't as satisfying when there's nothing new to strive for.

So longevity will rely on what comes next. This feels like the setting for a great survival tale, just with no story to tell yet. Understand that you're only getting the foundations here, but they're the foundations for a potentially outstanding survival adventure. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Surviving a wolf attack. Yeah, we're going straight back inside now...

THE WORST BIT



Dying after five truly valiant days of survival. It's enough to make us cry.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

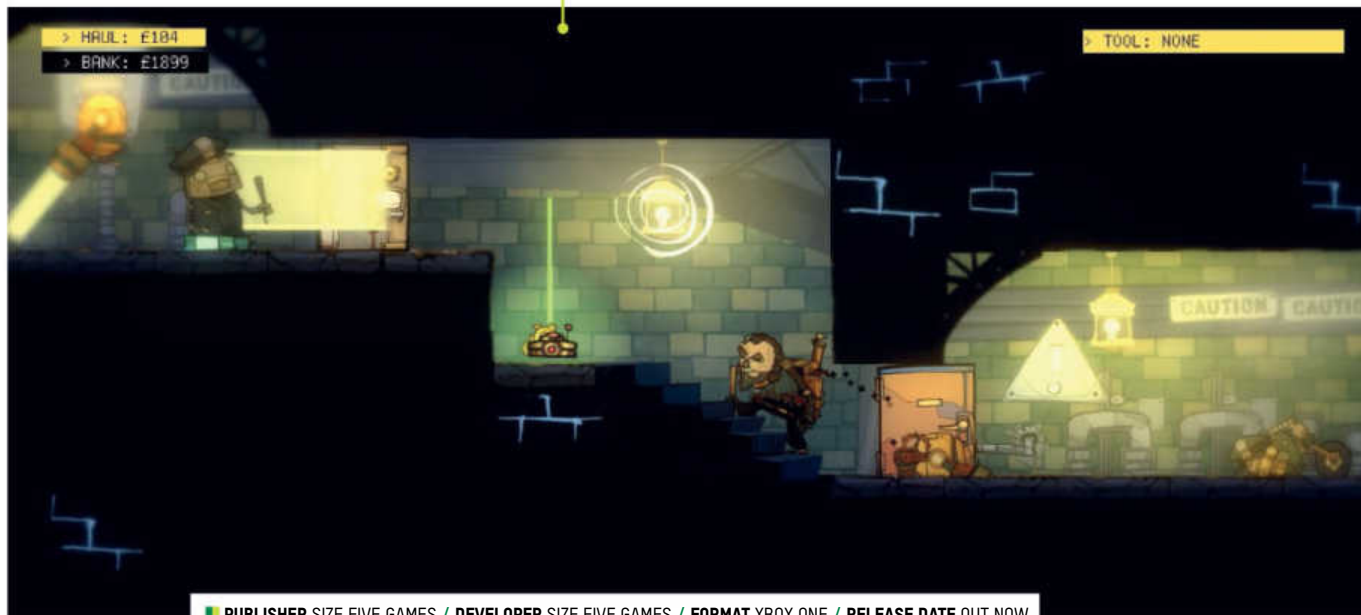
Story mode and more regions are incoming. If there's no horror in *Hinterland's* tale, that'll be a huge missed opportunity.

OVERALL

An excellent debut for the survival genre on Xbox One. It might be too harsh for some, but is one of the more rewarding games we've played in a while – here's to a long, bright future for it.

**XBOX
GAME
PREVIEW**

Why do the robots wear clothes? Who put that deadly explosive mine there? *The Swindle* is full of mysteries.



REVIEWER

TOM SENIOR

Live Private

@PCGLudo

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A heist platformer set across randomly generated levels.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Hard and repetitive, with moments of slapstick humor.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Platformer fans who love a challenge, even if it's unfair at times.

THE SWINDLE

Imagine if Ocean's Eleven was a platformer with spike pits...

Only the most desperate scoundrel would become a thief in *The Swindle*, where burglars have the life expectancy of a chocolate bunny in lava land.

Fortunately, every time one of these rogues is kabobed by a spike pit or bludgeoned to death by a robot guard, you step into the shoes of another to continue the cycle of petty theft and horrible death in the next robbery.

You have 100 heists over which to gather funds and stop the government from switching on an omniscient crime-ending snooping device. Each heist drops you into the grounds of a procedurally generated 2D building full of robot guards, small lumps of cash and a handful of lucrative terminals that can be hacked for big bucks. You have to barge in, avoid the cops, fill your pockets and return to your ship in order to escape and bank your haul. You can then

use your ill-gotten gains to buy security passes, unlock new tiers of challenge and access the final swindle itself.

It's quite hard – and deliberately so. As you amass cash, guards become more plentiful and new threats start to appear, such as cameras, flying cameras and flying cameras with guns on them. Soon, every room is rammed with guard bots, scanning their environment with a flurry of sight cones. Alert these guards and the robot police arrive. Most hits kill you instantly, which makes your odds of beating the bots in blue pretty slim once they've arrived in force. Occasionally, this creates thrilling moments of close escape and comical moments of failure, but more often than not *The Swindle's* initially interesting roguelike structure encourages more frustration than it does fun.

Your hobby little burglars are woefully ill-equipped for the task

at hand. In the beginning, you can only jump and punch. New abilities are unlocked with cash back at your high-tech airship and some, like the £10,000 bionic eyes that let you look up and down, should really be available from the start. You can't even hack terminals without a £100 hacking upgrade, so expect to spend a number of your missions scooping up petty change. Door-hacking skills, wall-cracking bombs and the scanner that points you towards treasure-stuffed terminals are also essential, because they help to fix shoddy level generation that can frequently screw you over.

Why, robot?

We've landed in multiple levels where only a single room of the complex was accessible. Without the £2,000 double-jump, we've found ourselves stuck in rooms at the bottom of long shafts that we couldn't escape from – there's a suicide option in the menu for a reason. We've dropped down other shafts onto a bed of spikes we couldn't have seen without those bionic eyes. Difficult games are great when you can only blame your own lack of skill for failure. Unfortunately, *The Swindle* too often punishes you arbitrarily with factors outside of your control. We headed into each new level

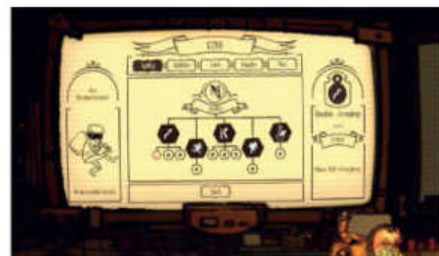


Trade secrets

Mines start to appear in levels, ready to blow up both intruders and a nine-block chunk of the level. If you get really close, you can hack them using a Simon-says press-the-direction mini-game. When the mine turns green, you know the next guard bot is going to get a nasty shock.

To hack systems you have to press the direction screamed at you. The screen zooms in to increase tension.

REVIEW



feeling as though we were rolling dice and hoping to get lucky rather than mastering a challenge. If terminals are located deep inside a facility, it's often better to generate a new level and keep regenerating until the precious terminals are within a few easy hops.

We'd forgive it more if the moment-to-moment jumping and whacking was more interesting. The dumb mechanical guards march back and forth, and can't be manipulated or distracted. What's more, the sheer number of them means there's no room for alternative approaches. Expect to spend a lot of time sliding down a wall, then hopping back up again, hoping for a tiny gap to open in a sea of roaming sight-cones. Meanwhile, cameras and flying drones cast angled detection lasers back and forth, and if the level spawns a guard on a single block, their cone of vision swivels about wildly like a frenzied lighthouse.

"Burglars have the life expectancy of a chocolate bunny in lava land"

Once you're 30 missions into a run, rooms turn into awful discos that are a nightmare to navigate without expensive smoke-bomb upgrades, and that's before the introduction of flat razor-backed robots that add yet more spike pits to a world already full of spike pits. Where fellow 2D stealth-'em-up *Mark of the Ninja* is a game of positioning, timing and the surgical removal of threats and throats, *The Swindle* is about desperate ramshackle thuggery in rooms overflowing with insta-kill enemies. The best strategy is just to shrug and chance it. It's a shame, because *The Swindle* is a great

idea with a neat structure. There's even a sweet spot before the levels become overcrowded with enemies that hints at a better game – albeit one still in need of improved level generation and a rebalanced upgrade system.

The game doesn't start until you've got a few key abilities, but buying those abilities stops you from purchasing the keys you need to progress. This vicious cycle traps you in those impotent early phases, and it takes oodles of patience to break out. That would be fine, but *The Swindle* lacks the fundamental quality that makes great roguelikes work: failing isn't fun. **OXM**

Avoid rooftops if you've tripped an alarm. Robot police ships will gun you down faster than you can say, "Stop, I'm an innocent rooftop pedestrian!"

The OXM Verdict

COOLEST CHARACTERS



YOUR THIEF
When your crook is killed (which happens rather often) a new one is procedurally generated for you. Young, old, scarred, or smiley, they always look perfect for the part.

WORSE THAN...



SPELUNKY
The gold standard for procedurally generated platformers. Only available on Xbox 360 for now, but this is a challenging game that succeeds in every way that *The Swindle* fails.

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

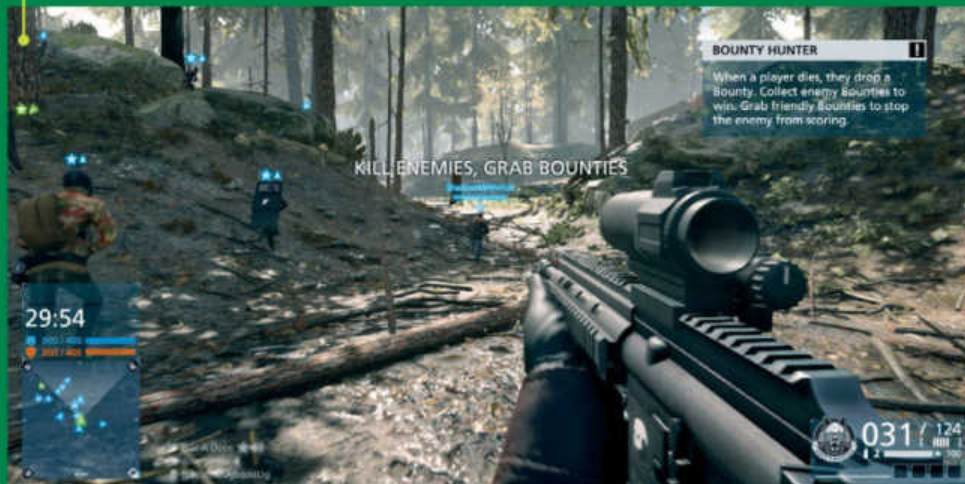
A pretty crime-caper platformer with good ideas, wounded by a system that creates inescapable deathtraps. Only the most patient and self-flagellating need apply.



ON THE DOWNLOAD

Latest add-ons and indie games rated

In *Bounty Hunter*, collect coins from your own team to prevent your foes finding them and gaining points.



PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER VISCERAL / FORMAT XBOX ONE, XBOX 360 / REVIEWER EDWIN EVANS-THIRLWELL / PRICE \$14.99

BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE: CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Get ready for a game of finders-keepers-campers

If you were hoping for a *Hardline* DLC pack that reasserts *Battlefield*'s old fondness for huge spats between armored vehicles and aircraft, *Criminal Activity* is not that pack. Instead, it bumps up the emphasis on close-quarters infantry tactics with new mode *Bounty Hunter* – a straight riff on *Kill Confirmed* from *Modern Warfare 3*, in which you must claim coins dropped by slain foes to score points.

This dramatically tightens up the risk-reward loop of basic team deathmatch. You've got to pick your moment, capping opponents either up-close

or away from open ground. Needless to say, *Bounty Hunter* doesn't lend itself to lone wolf sniping – you need to partner with a fast-moving enforcer who's able to gather the fruits of your kills. Solo marksmen do tend to fare well on the pack's new Backwoods map, however – a rolling stretch of lumber-strewn forest with epic sightlines. It's the map that feels most like military *Battlefield*, offering plenty of underbrush to lose yourself in.

The Beat and Black Friday are more in keeping with the campaign's vibe. The former is a low suburban expanse featuring a gas station, straggly roadside interiors and an ambush-friendly apartment complex. Black Friday, meanwhile, is a two-level mall with many a blind corner – run-and-gun central, in short, and hellishly intense when it comes to holding a flag in *Conquest*.

Code Blue is all about two things: annoying snipers on

rooftops, and the eponymous central club, which plays intriguing games with the aesthetic. You may find it difficult to make out crucial HUD markers while roaming the dancefloor, with its neon wallscreens and blue-lit tunnel to the rear bar.

Criminal Activity's most enduring mechanical additions may be its armor-piercing rounds and tactical toolkit, which

lets you capture objectives faster, a decisive advantage when playing *Blood Money* in particular. That aside, it's fun but inessential. Put it this way – you'd have a hard time picking this out of a police line-up. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

A respectable but unadventurous addition, which skews the game further towards infantry warfare.

7



We don't think you'll be finding many bargains in this Black Friday shopping mall.

ALSO RELEASED

From best to worst, the latest additions to Xbox Live Marketplace



1 GTA V – ILL GOTTEN GAINS

More guns, clothes, cars and even an iFruit watch, all in this generous free update.

Price: FREE



2 BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT – NEW 52 SKIN PACK

New costumes for Batman, Robin and Nightwing are completely free!

Price: FREE



3 THE ESCAPISTS – ESCAPE TEAM

Play as Mr T and steal a tank, in another cute piece of *Escapists* DLC.

Price: \$4.49



4 THE WITCHER 3 – FOOL'S GOLD

A new quest has Geralt visiting a village populated entirely by pigs.

Price: FREE



5 MINECRAFT – MINECON 2015 SKIN PACK

Celebrate Minecon! By not being able to go. Bah. Download this free DLC instead.

Price: FREE

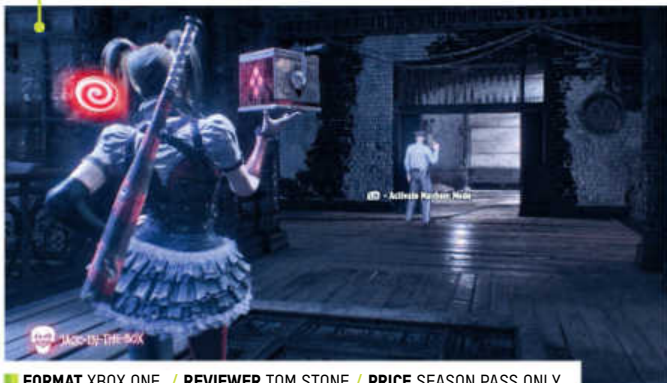


6 TETRIS ULTIMATE – HAUNTED DLC

Tetronimos becomes invisible when you level up. Stop trying to fix what isn't broken.

Price: \$2.99

Lob the box at him? Baseball bat to the noggin? Leave him be, turn life around?



FORMAT XBOX ONE / REVIEWER TOM STONE / PRICE SEASON PASS ONLY

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT – HARLEY QUINN STORY PACK

Included as a 'bonus' to those who pre-ordered *Arkham Knight* on Xbox One, this is almost as disappointing as accidentally getting the PC version. Playing as Harley Quinn, you break into Bludhaven police station to cause havoc that ties into the main game. We won't spoil it, but the story is as slight as they come, with almost no new insight into the main campaign.

Not that we'd have had a problem with a standalone adventure, and Harley makes for an engaging lead. Chattering

over her earpiece is The Penguin, basically her Alfred, if Alfred was a few classes lower and a few shades more horrible. Combat is almost exactly the same as *Arkham Knight*, except with a lot less moves and slightly

//Stealth is tricky – Harley prefers takedowns to be as loud as possible//

more brutal takedowns (several baseball bat hits to the crotch left us wincing). Stealth is a little trickier, as Harley prefers her takedowns to be as loud as possible. Fewer gadgets make it a less fun game. You'll mainly just wander around, listening to weird *Sherlock*-esque music, waiting for guards to split up.

Harley gets a few gizmos, but they're just Batman's with sillier names.

An explosive jack-in-the-box is the explosive gel. Laughing gas is the smoke bomb. The snare trap that ties up

enemies is fairly new, but mostly just stands in for the Batarang.

Plus it's so short it feels less like a prequel to the main game and more like a demo. Sadly, a completely forgettable add-on to an unforgettable game. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

A nice idea, lazily executed. One of Bats' biggest villains is wasted in a game that barely lasts half an hour.

4

Get up close to see the best of the Smart-Disc.



FORMAT XBOX ONE / REVIEWER ALEX DALE / PRICE \$4.99

MORTAL KOMBAT X: PREDATOR

Literally hunching over so he can fit into the frame of the action, the Predator (yes, *that* Predator) makes for a predictably awesome sight – and, if your fighting style of choice is fast, aggressive and relentless he will make a formidable addition to your *Mortal Kombat X* roster.

Actually one of the more nuanced fighters in the game, the Predator's moveset lends itself to

a patient game, where you lure the opponent into position with a variety of setup moves, before wading in and doing massive

damage. The special moves reflect the flavor of the character; he has a cloaking shield that reduces block damage and lets him reduce the gap between himself and his opponent. But much more useful is his Smart-Disc. Although

this homing projectile can easily be destroyed if it's deployed at a distance, it's massively distracting to your foe. If it connects in mid-air they find themselves momentarily suspended, making them a sitting duck for a high-impact close-quarters attack – an attack such as the wince-worthy low-range but high-damage X-Ray move. He begins by searing his foe's face off with

an energy blast, before leaping into the air and severing the grounded victim's spinal column with a well-aimed Smart-Disc.

The Disc later re-emerges to be crammed into his beaten foe's brain. All this gore and, ironically, the best thing about the character is his lime green blood; it's a throwback to the family-friendly SNES port of *MKII*. **OXM**

//Lure your foe into position, then wade in and do massive damage//

The OXM Verdict

The price of a burger gets you a unique fighter of style, spectacle and surprising substance.

8

Music Special / A themed look at those hidden indie gems and DIY disasters



CHRISTMAS ROCKS!

Play a tedious rhythm game, while awful commentary tells 'jokes'. Santa needs to put a stop to this.



MUSICKNESS

Hit the good notes and avoid the infected ones. You'll be sick of this in no time.



MUSIC ISLAND

Kill turtles and fish, to a pleasant beat. Surprisingly not as horrible as that sounds.



ZOMBIE HERO

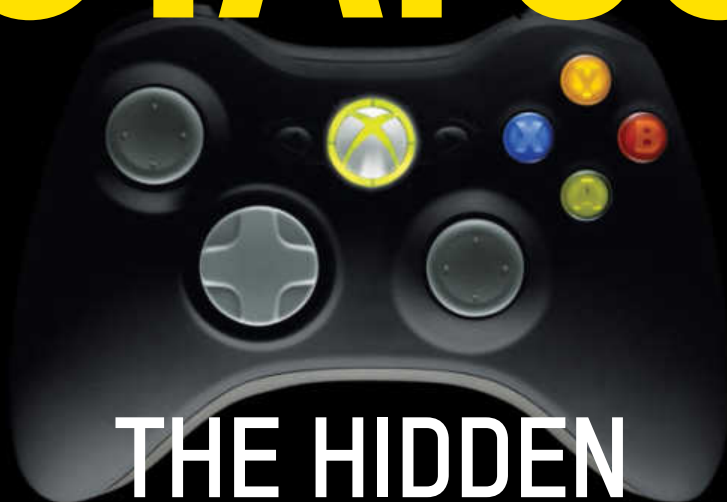
Guitar Hero but with more zombies and no guitars. Or songs. Or fun. Shoot it in the head.



PROJECT RAP

More like Project Cra... actually, silly multiplayer fun has you rhyming against the clock.

CULT STATUS



THE HIDDEN XBOX 360 GEMS WE WANT ON XBOX ONE

Backwards compatibility is brilliant news – not only because we were running out of power sockets, but because it gives us an opportunity to return to some last-gen favorites. Not all games get the time in the spotlight they deserve, of course – so here are the Xbox 360 games we’re hoping to see get a second chance on Xbox One

Writer: Chris Schilling

#01

EL SHADDAI: ASCENSION OF THE METATRON

With a title like that, and a story based on an ancient Jewish religious text, it might come as a surprise that *El Shaddai* didn't break all sales records. Okay, maybe not. But this is a better: part brawler, part platformer, all mindblower. Mechanically, it's simple, though its combat is robust and its 2D platforming interludes serviceable. What made this so special is its unforgettable visual journey through an unpredictable world, drawing inspiration from *Tron*, *The Bible*, MC Escher and Jean Paul Gaultier – sometimes seemingly all at once.



#02

NIER

Persevere past an awful opening and this action RPG's rough edges melt away, leaving you with a game that constantly reinvents itself: *Zelda* one minute, a bullet-hell shooter the next. Its ambitious story only grows more engrossing the further you get, and its biggest twists don't arrive until second and third playthroughs cast fresh light on the actions of the first. PlatinumGames is working on a follow-up with creator Taro Yoko – a man who makes *Suda 51* look like the model of restraint – which, to say the very least, is exciting news: Yoko's brilliantly bonkers storytelling allied to the studio's knack for slick, satisfying combat should make for something really special. But we want this first.

#03

ALPHA PROTOCOL

Bourne, Bond or Bauer? Obsidian's spy sim allows you to pick which kind of agent you'd prefer to be, though a slew of glitches means you often end up looking more like Blunderer or Buffoon. Technical wonkiness aside, this is that rare game where your actions genuinely make a difference, rather than giving you a binary choice that leads to either Happy Cutscene A or Sad Cutscene B. And with some memorable characters and great twists, it weaves a ripping yarn, whether you're winning folks over with charm or waving a gun in their faces.



#04

DEADLY PREMONITION

So bad it's good? Nonsense. *Deadly Premonition* is both bad and good. Originally designed for the PS2, it's not much to look at, its third-person shooting is clunky and its car handling woeful. Yet as the wonderfully abrasive Francis York Morgan investigates a murder in the quiet rural town of Greenvale, both the central mystery and the cast of oddballs draw you in, while you're afforded the freedom to investigate far beyond the key story missions.

Atmospheric and idiosyncratic, it owes a significant debt to David Lynch, but its strange, off-kilter ambience feels unique in games.



#05

RESONANCE OF FATE

Forget the none-too-subtle Tower of Babel metaphor, and that scene where Vashyron expresses a preference for the larger-bosomed lady via the medium of dance. This is the great JRPG time forgot, featuring one of the most inventive battle systems. A blend of real-time movement and turn-based tactics, it asks you to inflict 'scratch' damage on robotic enemies with sub-machine guns, before depleting their health with pistols and grenades. Once mastered, you'll regularly pull off elaborate displays of gymnastic gunplay.





#06

SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED

This much-trumpeted collaboration between two of Japan's brightest talents – Shinji Mikami and Suda 51 – didn't quite live up to the billing, coming across as a hodgepodge of ideas that couldn't compare with either creator's best work. Yet we still feel this is a fine game in its own right: an entertaining shooter with some great boss fights, and Suda's trademark kitchen-sink invention in frequent evidence. Throw in some striking visual design and genuinely funny interplay between protagonist Garcia Hotspur and sidekick Johnson and you've got not only the weirdest game EA's ever published, but a comedy horror that's more than the sum of its copious wiener gags.

#07

BINARY DOMAIN

This one's worth buying for its combat alone. Shooting robots has never been so much fun: every round that lands causes a satisfying spray of shards, while targeted fire allows you to remove limbs and heads, though enemies are only temporarily inconvenienced by missing arms and legs. Beyond that, its pulpy story blends B-movie thrills with surprising smarts, while its cast of archetypes exhibit genuine character growth as the plot motors onward. And what other game features a bandana-wearing French robot purring his approval of your leadership qualities?



#08

VANQUISH

It's a scandal that *Vanquish* is considered a cult hit, rather than the skyscraping success it deserved to be. It's up there with *Resi 4* in the pantheon of third-person actioners, a high-speed shooter with the jagged intensity of the best manga. It barely pauses for breath, unless you count the brief cig breaks hero Sam Gideon takes, flicking the stub out to draw fire before vaulting back into the fray. Slo-mo knee slides, crunching melee attacks, a DLC pistol as brilliant as Master Chief's, and robots bopping to pulsing techno: all win.



#09

LOST ODYSSEY

A traditionalist JRPG, *Lost Odyssey* tells the story of Kaim, an immortal hero whose stoic demeanor belies a lifetime of heartache: it turns out living forever isn't a whole heap of fun when your mates keep dying on you. Its turn-based scraps are fine, if nothing especially new, but you'll find it hard to forget the impossibly sad tales of Kaim's thousand-year past. Beautifully written (and translated) and soundtracked by *Final Fantasy* regular Nobuo Uematsu at his bottom-tip-wobbling best, you'll be blubbing like a kid denied a second slice of birthday cake.



#10

BLUR

The arcade racer: once considered a mainstay of any gamer's collection, in recent years it's struggled to find an audience whose need for speed now tends to be sated by the authenticity of the modern sim. *Blur*'s brand of weaponized racing – think *Mario Kart* with real-world cars – flunked in sales terms, but with hindsight it's clearly a lot of fun, boosted by great track design, sublime handling and a neon-tinged arsenal of power-ups with which to shunt and bash your rivals out of contention. This is well worth another look.



#11

TOP SPIN 4

It might lack the arcade immediacy and convincingly sweaty players of *Virtua Tennis*, but *Top Spin 4* is playing the long game. It's a tennis sim that demands you master its nuances before hitting the court, whereupon you're offered a full range of drop shots, stop volleys and cross-court passes. Where in *Virtua Tennis* your shots will almost always stay within the tramlines, there's a greater tension to rallies here, with riskier shots giving you a better chance of a winner.



#12

CATHERINE

The dictionary definition of 'not for everyone', *Catherine* is a highly eccentric game of two halves – and one of those halves is a block-pushing puzzler. For the eight people who didn't skip to the next entry immediately – well, you're potentially in for a treat. These tense sequences, which see you building stairways to escape a series of nightmarish creatures, are punctuated by story interludes involving a twisted love triangle that dares to paint its lead as a pitiable, indecisive schlub. Equal parts risky and risqué, it's a provocative, hallucinatory experience that is grounded enough to leave you pondering a few uncomfortable emotional truths.



#13

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

After years of shooting bad guys in the face in the likes of *Call of Duty*, Yager's ambitious journey into the heart of darkness strives to make us feel bad for doing so. That it succeeds (to a point) is down to some strong writing and powerful set-pieces, which unflinchingly confront the horrifying cost of war. If it could easily be retitled 'Post-Apocalypse Now', there's a novelty in seeing these ideas explored interactively, as it draws a deep line in the sand to separate itself from the shooter crowd.



#15

CHILD OF EDEN

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's spiritual successor to *Rez* didn't enjoy similar critical acclaim. Perhaps *Eden's* uplifting J-Pop didn't have the cool factor of *Rez's* ultra-hip electronica, but the latter would have been a poor fit for a game with such an optimistic outlook. With a controller, it's great, but its rhythmic shooting is transformed by Kinect: your sweeps and pushes feel like you're conducting a digital orchestra. At times, it offers a sensation of heady euphoria, not least the sublime moment when the music reaches a crescendo and a space whale is suddenly, thrillingly reborn as a shimmering phoenix.



#14

ASURA'S WRATH

An interactive anime in which the world's angriest man gets even madder, growing extra arms to punch holes in gods, spaceships and entire planets. A good deal of your time with *Asura's Wrath* is spent watching rather than playing, and yet it's hard to mind: the brawling is fittingly simple for a man powered exclusively by rage, while the intensity of Asura's trials – your button-mashing, stick-twirling inputs amplifying the physicality of his actions – makes you glad of the moments where you can put the pad down for a bit. A triumphant, primal roar of a game, *Asura's Wrath* is deliciously absurd, and all the better for it.



#16

WHEELMAN

Some people think *Wheelman* is trash.

They're wrong. It's half-trash. The moments where plastic-faced Vin Diesel exits a vehicle to shoot identikit bad guys are at best boringly generic. But once you're behind the wheel, as you skid and swerve through narrow Barcelona streets, the arc of a handbrake turn scattering chairs and tables from roadside cafés, it thrills. The addition of right-stick shunts and lurches gives the car chases an addictively tangible feel. Try it.



#17

CALL OF JUAREZ

Some would say their favorite entry in this series was *Bound in Blood*; others might plump for the recent *Gunslinger*. But there's something special about the original – for all its occasionally ramshackle feel, it's a game made with an unfakeable affection for the genre it's pastiching. It's basically two games in one: you alternate between mistakenly accused youngster Billy and his charismatic pursuer, the Reverend Ray – a man whose voice suggests a daily diet of dirt, gravel and Woodbines. As Ray lays waste to enemies Billy carefully sneaked past, it's a resourceful, imaginative brand of shooter.

#18

EARTH DEFENSE FORCE 2017

It's not often we'll recommend a game with so many bugs, but here we'll make an exception. Admittedly, we're not talking about technological flubs; rather the giant insects who swarm up buildings. Robots and spaceships soon join in as the invaders keep upping the ante, while your hapless crew of soldiers attempts to splatter them. It's low-budget fifties sci-fi in game form, but who cares when it's this much fun?



#20

THE CLUB

Despite describing it as "a racing game with guns" Bizarre Creations stepped well outside its comfort zone for this unsung score-attack shooter. It's like a racer only in the sense that each level has a perfect line to follow if you're to reach the finish line in the fastest possible time. Speed is of the essence, then, but you'll need to learn and adapt to the behaviors of your foes – the process of which is repetitive but rewarding. It didn't find an audience, sadly – perhaps a result of its grimy, oddly bleak looks sitting uncomfortably with its arcade-style run-and-gun action – but it's worth another shot.



#19

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION: REVOLUTION

A simplified version of the popular PC strategy series, *Civ Rev* (as it became known) was mocked in some quarters for the crime of daring to be more accessible. Its immediacy is a boon, allowing you to get to the more interesting stuff quicker, as you compete against a series of famous historical leaders for world domination. The caricatures of Napoleon, Cleopatra and company are amusingly drawn, and whether you aim to win by force or simply amass more riches than your rivals, the process is always absorbing. Be warned, however: that Gandhi dude isn't nearly as nice as he makes out.



#22

SINGULARITY

A *BioShock*-inspired FPS with wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey elements thrown in for good measure, this is ostensibly meat-and-potatoes stuff. But the chefs at Raven are experts at this kind of thing. Its temporal puzzles are hardly taxing, though they work as gently stimulating pace-breakers, and if it magpies elements from the best, at least it's smart in its thievery, most notably offering a fun riff on *Half-Life 2*'s Gravity Gun. Raven knows how to make guns feel good, and if, broadly speaking, we've been here before, a return visit proves surprisingly worthwhile.



#21

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

Unfortunately renowned as the game that brought the career of Curt Schilling (no relation) as game developer to a premature end, *Kingdoms of Amalur* is a not-half-bad role-player that has few new ideas of its own, but ticks plenty of boxes. Its combat is satisfying, its world is often very pretty, and if it's a little too fond of dialogue of the 'Flarglefang of the Jurgleburgs' variety, its side stories are often as interesting and involving as its main quests. Pleasingly accessible and surprisingly substantial without overstaying its welcome, it deserves better than to be remembered as a flop.

#23

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

The best version of a great beat-'em-up, *VF5*'s belated arrival on Xbox was tempered by a series of tweaks from the PS3 original, and an online mode that worked better than its Sony counterpart. *Street Fighter* might be the populist pick, but *VF* is the fighting game connoisseur's choice, its one-on-one battles an elegantly restrained dance next to the pyrotechnics and histrionics of its peers. Its accessible but deep systems are well balanced, and though the online audience might have dwindled, this remains golden.



#24

THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

It might have been too short to pass muster as a full-price retail release, but this captures enough of the pace and intensity of the Jason Bourne movies in its thumping fights, thrilling vehicular pursuits and aggressively shaky camerawork to be worth a buy at a lower price. Matt Damon might be conspicuously absent, but digital Bourne is as capable as his silver screen counterpart, and there's a palpable weight behind every blow in the outstanding hand-to-hand combat sequences. It's as linear as they come, but this will fill the gap until Damon's cinematic return as the titular super-spy nicely.



#25

IL-2 STURMOVIK: BIRDS OF PREY

The kind of title that prompts baffled looks when you ask for it at your local retailer... even during launch week. The first console entry in a series that had attracted admirers on PC, *Birds of Prey* introduced a friendlier control scheme, making a famously unforgiving game more accessible. Purists shouldn't worry: you can turn off all assists in Simulation mode, where you've got a fight on your hands simply to keep your plane from stalling, let alone prepare for a bombing raid on Berlin.





NEXT MONTH

SCALEBOUND

DRAGON RAGE! PLATINUM'S FANTASY EPIC
LEADS OUR GAMESCOM BLOWOUT



FALLOUT 4: THE LATEST FACT BOMBS

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS WITH CRACKDOWN

HOW QUANTUM BREAK REINVENTS GAMING

ON SALE
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All contents subject to change. Sorry about that.

XBOX EXTRA

Squeezing more from your machine every month



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FALLOUT 3

If dog is man's best friend, the feeling isn't mutual.



88 OXM Investigates

Bolivia! India! New Zealand! The hotspots that your Xbox will have you visiting this winter.

90 Now Playing: Fallout 3

Martin Kitts slayed his dog and scattered human remains on a DJ booth. As per usual.

92 Now Playing: Final Fantasy Type-0 HD

This spin-off has some strange ideas on how the passing of time works.

93 Now Playing: Shovel Knight

Revisiting the Xbox-exclusive *Battletoads* stage. And remembering how much we hate them.

94 Live Spotlight

The Witcher 3's finest free DLC pack explored, plus how to make *Project CARS* run smoother.

96 OXM Replay

Why you've 'garotte' (got) to play *Hitman: Blood Money* – Agent 47's finest hour.

98 Fallout Perks We Want

Hello, Bethesda? We want rumbly sidekicks and the ability to dine on bottlecaps, please.



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98

AROUND THE WORLD

This year's E3 line-up was a well-traveled bunch of games – between the lot, they take us to all six continents (we're not counting that crummy cold one). Here's where you can expect to go this winter...

HOMEFRONT 2: THE REVOLUTION

PHILADELPHIA

Cheese steaks all round! Maybe not, as this future Philly is controlled by the oppressive, steak-hating Korean People's Army. Time you rang the Liberty Bell loud and took back the state.

FALLOUT 4

BOSTON

Birthplace of the American Revolution, a city of great technological prowess and there's a subway station that's just perfect for feral ghouls. The perfect place to call home after an apocalypse.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: SYNDICATE

LONDON

The industrial revolution allows for more modern gameplay and gadgets (like, er, a rope launcher), and its smog-filled streets should be the perfect place to pull off sneaky assassinations.

HITMAN

PARIS

A Paris fashion show full of glitz and glamour. Bright lights. Fireworks displays. Chandeliers that 'accidentally' fall on the host's head. A stylish start to Agent 47's latest world tour.

OVERKILL'S THE WALKING DEAD

WASHINGTON

We can't wait to rescue the president/run away screaming from President Zombie in this Washington set co-op shooter from the *Payday 2* developers.

LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

NEW YORK

If you recall the end of the movie, New York takes quite a pummeling. It should be easier to rebuild when it's made of Lego bricks, yes?

THE DIVISION

NEW YORK CITY

Seeing a once populated city completely empty has the *28 Days Later* effect. It's unsettling, disarming, keeps you alert – exactly how you need to be to play *The Division* if you want to survive.

GHOST RECON: WILDLANDS

BOLIVIA

Deserts, mountains, forests – the ever-changing South American terrain means you'll have to switch between a rotating cast of dune buggies, dirt bikes and parachuting to get around the place.

FORZA MOTORSPORT 6

RIO DE JANEIRO

A beautiful city track that's so vivid, it makes Los Santos look like Sin City. How are we supposed to keep our eyes on the road? *crashes into that big statue. You know the one.*

JUST CAUSE 3

THE MEDITERRANEAN

Real beaches just can't compete with the fun we're going to have in *Just Cause 3*, gliding over crystal-blue waters, casually tethering holidaymakers with red barrels as we swoop past.

IN 80 GAMES*

*May feature slightly fewer than 80 games

OXM
INVESTIGATES



Uncovering
the other side of
Xbox gaming

DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

PRAGUE

2015 Prague is lovely, 2029 Prague? A once progressive city, now forcing the augmented to live in overpopulated slums. Did you really think daytime scenes meant *Deus Ex* was getting lighter?

ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: RUSSIA

RUSSIA

Our private investigator sold us some hot info – this game's set in Russia, during the messy aftermath of the 1918 revolution. We'd argue that's a setting worthy of a proper 3D *Creed*.

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

SIBERIA

Sparsely populated, draped in thick ice, packed with treacherous terrain and, it's rumored, a lost city that you simply won't find on Google Street View.

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

AFGHANISTAN

Real-world politics and the chance to ride a horse through a sandstorm – just the mad blend of silly and serious that Hideo Kojima was never going to be able to resist.

ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: INDIA

INDIA

Our private investigator sold us some more hot info – this game's apparently going to be set in Japan. He's so fired.

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

CAIRO

50 years in the future, Cairo's definitely seen better days. But destroying real-world locations is one of *Call of Duty's* best tricks – nothing helps establish a global threat than seeing that the bits of the world we like are on fire.

MAD MAX

AUSTRALIA

From the desolated wasteland, to the mutated freaks who chase you down, the attention to detail is outstanding. Years must have been spent in Australia to capture its essence so truly.

SEBASTIEN LOEB RALLY EVO

AUSTRALIA

As part of Loeb's esteemed career, we'll be tearing it up on Australian turf. We anticipate a slightly different racing experience to *Mad Max*.



NOW
PLAYING

The games we're
still going back
to, and why

Does anything about
this getup suggest
'responsible dog
owner' to you?

Martin Kitts is playing...

Fallout 3



BECAUSE... "The Capital Wasteland is still my favorite game location"

▲ **LOVING** How abandoning morals reveals new possibilities. ▼ **HATING** Flying insect enemies. No fun at all to fight.

So, in *Fallout 4* you get to be accompanied through the Wasteland by a dog. Great, you might say. That's so *Fallout*. But what if maybe in *Fallout 3* you had a bad experience with dogs and – end of the world or not – have proved yourself to be a completely unsuitable dog owner?

My own problems with *Fallout 3*'s Dogmeat began early in our relationship. I rescued him in Minefield because it seemed like the thing to do, but he swiftly became a liability. I'd command him to go off into the ruins and find me some cool stuff. Hours later he'd come limping back with nothing. After a couple of failed expeditions I refused to waste any more valuable Stimpacks on him, so he'd hobble around looking annoyed.

Unfortunately for the both of us, Dogmeat would frequently demonstrate

his sour disposition by attacking absolutely anything within a half-mile radius. His ears would prick up, he'd scamper over a hill, and when I was beginning to wonder if he'd finally fallen down a well he'd return pursued by packs of Radroaches or those annoying poisonous, flying, stinging things.

There was a lot of fight in that half-crippled irradiated hound, but he'd frequently bite off more than he could chew. Naturally, I'd have to face the consequences, and eventually my patience wore right through. Low on ammunition, sneaking past a super mutant camp, I was almost clear of danger when Dogmeat decided to take a chunk out of one of them. All hell broke loose, and pretty soon I got blasted into meaty slow-mo chunks. The last thing I saw was Dogmeat, still alive,

DETAILS

Released

Oct 2008

Dev

Bethesda

Pub

Bethesda

Format Xbox 360

Score 9/10

Recap

Drink toilet water! Shoot off a man's arm! Weep for mankind's demise! All this and more awaits you in this epic RPG.

running round in circles and yapping at my murderers, who couldn't even be bothered to attack him.

Upon reloading my save, I stocked up on ammo and collected Dogmeat for his final journey. We didn't go far – any patch of Wasteland would do. Look at the flowers, I suggested halfheartedly, before unloading a shotgun into his face. A three-rocket salute ensured he didn't come back for a second helping, and that was the end of it. No more Dogmeat. No more betrayals.

Coincidentally, tiresome DJ Three Dog suffered a similar fate. I had to dispatch him within the confines of his own studio because I couldn't lure him outside, and thanks to the Bloody Mess perk there wasn't a whole lot left of him. I managed to salvage his lucky sunglasses and bandana, which I later sold to a fan, and I arranged some of his body parts in a respectful pattern on the mixing desk. His reluctant replacement now keeps calling me an asshole on the radio, which I really don't appreciate. Perhaps it's time for another special guest appearance. ■

//Look at the flowers, I suggested halfheartedly, before unloading a shotgun into his face//



Four seconds later, the dog's face was clouded with sadness.





What, you mean your school didn't have giant fighty robots?



Jenny Baker is playing...

Final Fantasy Type-0 HD



BECAUSE... "Time stands still when you're having fun"

▲ **LOVING** Paying zero hours to train in the arena ▼ **HATING** Paying six hours to enter the world map

As a new cadet in *Final Fantasy Type-0 HD*'s manga-worthy magic academy, Akademeia, I've found lots of fun ways to pass the time. You can earn XP and stat boosts by sitting through lectures, level up in the arena without expending a single Hi-Potion or enjoy a cool glass of back-story in the ready room. The list is a lengthy one, but there's a cruel catch: not all of my favorite activities are free.

Attending Akademeia is like going on a day trip to a military-themed amusement park where time is money. Two hours will buy you the essentials – a flashback, a lesson about defensive

magic, an awkward conversation with a Tonberry – six will buy you entry to the world map where you can enjoy some all-you-can-pillage dungeons, and 12 will buy you an Expert Trial (a quest type akin to getting a plushie out of a claw machine). As the old saying goes: "if you're not having fun, you need to take a crash course in time management".

Converting time into events isn't tricky. Hours and days are distributed as a variable lump sum whenever you complete a mission, and all you have to do to spend them is interact with NPCs who display the '!' icon. However, it is important to remember that hours can't be hoarded. Surplus time disappears if you take on your next mission ahead of

DETAILS

Released

Mar 2015

Dev

Square Enix

Pub

Square Enix

Format

Xbox One

Score

7/10
The darkest *Final Fantasy* to date. Contains one magic academy, four crystals and 13 Moogles in fancy dress.

schedule, and the exchange rate is pretty unforgiving too. I have often sacrificed two hours for just a few seconds of dialogue with an angry Moogle – "S!#% you, kupo".

Of course, time isn't the only currency. Gil can be handed over for inventory candy, SPP for equipment, and freebies are bountiful. In fact, some of the most enjoyable activities have taken place with my wallet shut and watch frozen. You can breed new varieties of Chocobo, run errands, and fight soldiers to your heart's content. Technically, you can reach the level cap without taking a step off-campus, but who has time for that? Other than a cadet with a neat schedule.

Type-0's usage of time means sleep is skipped over without so much as an 'oyasumi', but you're also fully immersed in the cadet lifestyle. Achieving S-rank results is no longer just about acing your assignments. If, like me, you want to graduate top of Class Zero, you need to invest your free time with care. ■

//As the old saying goes: 'if you're not having fun, you need to take a crash course in time management'//

Alex Dale is playing...

Shovel Knight



BECAUSE... "I had an itch to revisit Zitz, Rash and Pimple"

▲ **LOVING** The rope-swinging duel with, er, which Battletoad is that? ▼ **HATING** One-hit kills. ONE-HIT KILLS.

To me, the Battletoads were never anything more than budget-bin Ninja Turtles. Instead of eating pizza, you'd imagine they dined on cold garlic bread. Instead of living in the sewer, they'd live in... I don't know, wherever it is the waste goes when the Turtles flush their toilets.

But there's no denying the NES game they star in has the charisma they lack. While it's somewhat overrated – a frustrating beat-'em-up with infuriating design choices – it does have style, with iconic moments such as a bungee-jump plunge down a crow-infested cave, and the infamous 'Turbo Tunnel' level: a side-scrolling hoverbike section so tough you could knock a rhino out with it.



So when I learned the Xbox One version of *Shovel Knight* has an exclusive *Battletoads* crossover stage that lets me relive these moments without having to endure the brutal original, I had to dig in. The stage is discovered in a pleasingly retro way – by hacking away at a brick at the back of the Hall of Champions until a passageway appears. Your reward is a whirlwind gauntlet run that takes in *Battletoads*' two most iconic stages

DETAILS

Released

Apr 2015

Dev Yacht Club Games

Pub Yacht Club Games

Format Xbox One

Score 9/10

– beginning with the rope descent, transitioning to a hoverbike section before finishing with a boss fight. It's a greatest-hits package, but within a modernized, fairer world.

Or at least that's the pitch. In reality, it brings out the worst in *Shovel Knight*. Both sections are littered with one-hit obstacles: walls that appear from nowhere and, in the cave, these jerks that snip your rope if you don't take them out first. The *Battletoads* stage is easily the worst part of *Shovel Knight*, in fact – an annoying outlier in a game that otherwise pays homage to the unmistakable charms of the NES without repeating its mistakes. Get back in the wherever-the-waste-from-the-sewer goes, you insufferable toads. ■

Tom Stone is playing...

Gears of War 2



BECAUSE... "It's my last hope for emotional wellbeing"

▲ **LOVING** That the excellent shooting has aged really well. ▼ **HATING** My complete lack of empathy for Maria.

Like anyone with a soul, I can't wait for *Gears of War: Ultimate Edition*. Digging through my old games I gave *Gears of War 2* another go, and was pleased to see how much it holds up. It's still an action-packed, fast-paced, nicely varied, Locust-blasting thrill ride with



some of my favorite shooting in any game. Bar the graphics, and a love affair with the 'color' gray, only one major flaw stands out for me – I still don't care about Dom's missing wife.

Back in 2008, this made sense. I was a young, emotionally underdeveloped jerk. I had no time for backstories; I just wanted to chainsaw Locusts. Seven years later, I thought I'd changed. I weep during sad movies. I help old ladies cross roads. I've even stopped throwing dynamite into strollers. The ice around my heart is starting to melt.

But the fate of Dom's wife still gets a roll of the eyes and a 'skip cutscene' from me. At the time of writing, I'm not married, but I always assumed if my

DETAILS

Released

Nov 2008

Dev

Epic Games

Pub

Microsoft Studios

Format Xbox 360

Score 9/10

significant other was kidnapped in a devastating inter-species war, I'd at least be a bit annoyed. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe I don't have a soul after all. I guess my lack of compassion could be because the plot is actually pretty poor. But that's just the kind of brutal logic you'd expect from a robot like me.

I tried to keep playing until I cared about the tragedy of Mrs Dom. On playthrough 37 I shed a few tears, but that was probably just because I hadn't slept in weeks. *Gears of War 2* finally confirms me as the psychopath we all suspected. Worrying, but who cares about trivial things like healthy emotional development when the shooting is still that spectacular? ■



Reports from
Xbox's biggest
communities

2/3 Pops' mold antlers
9 Bread
4 Crossbow

Level 26 and
using shield on
a Level 5 wolf?
Safety first!

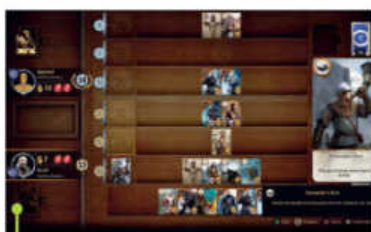
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Free DLC: for when you're worried 200 hours of game just isn't enough

Details Dev CD Projekt RED / Pub CD Projekt RED / Reporter Mark Green



Geralt finds some candles to accidentally extinguish.



Oh, a picture of Gwent. How did this get in here?

Despite having the silliest of all developer names (except maybe Heimlich Maneuver Studios, which we just made up), CD Projekt RED gets buckets of love from the gaming community. People feel it *cares* – and who could argue, given that it's bucked the system to give every *Witcher 3* owner 16 blobs of no-questions-asked free DLC. It's quite the offer.

Some of it is thin: the beards and hairstyles DLC is only for people who wish Geralt looked more like Jeff Bridges (so basically just Jeff Bridges). But then there's July's 'Where the Cat and Wolf Play': a quest that's teeny-tiny, but still exemplifies much of what makes *Wild Hunt* such a bundle of brilliance.

It's set in early-game area Velen, and there's something faintly nostalgic about returning to its whispering woods and the medieval twangs of its melancholic ambient music – you probably spent a good 20 hours here as a novice, so it

ON THE CLOCK
How we spent our
time in the game



95% "How about a
game of Gwent?"
5% Playing the
actual game

//Geralt playing Sherlock Holmes with his Witcher Sense never gets old//

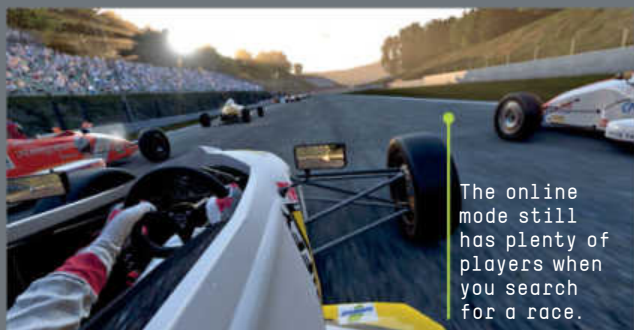
feels oddly like home. If it's possible to feel at home in a place where an apple tree is as likely to have a dead body hanging from it as an actual apple.

It's not all depressing, though. Oh, wait, yes it is: you find an *entire village* slaughtered. Geralt playing Sherlock Holmes with his Witcher Sense never gets old and, before long, the culprit's unearthed. Cripes: it's *another Witcher*.

This is the big moment: kill the killer, or swallow his story of a deal betrayed and a momentary lapse of judgment? Such is the weight of CDPR's world-building, we've seen players talk about putting down the controller to stroke their metaphorical Geralt-beard and ponder what the Witcher would do.

We decided to let the guy go. Geralt seemed glumly resigned to this world where brutality is banal. But he did get a pretty sweet sword out of it. And an impressively touching little adventure for the bargain price of \$0 – making us giddy about what's in store for October's first full-on paid DLC. But enough of all that: anyone for Gwent? ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN WILD HUNT THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Grabbing the alternate set of Gwent designs. Did we mention Gwent at all?



The online mode still has plenty of players when you search for a race.



Project CARS

Thought patch 1.4 broke the framerate?
Bet you don't recycle...

Dev Slightly Mad Studios / Pub Bandai Namco Entertainment /
Reporter Justin Towell

Do you find 55 frames per second unacceptable? Well, patch 1.4 came out with the aim of making *Project CARS*' rate 5% smoother (for the 5% who care)... only, it didn't. At least, not for everyone. Things started to noticeably chug after the update for some players (us included), making the game look far rougher than before the patch came out. Weird thing is, some people lapped up the patch's enhancements like it was ambrosia from the racing gods. It seemed fine to them.

The culprit, amazingly, is Xbox One's power-saving mode. You know how you can make a choice between ultra-fast wake-up times and saving the planet in the console's settings? Well, the 1.4 patch uses some back-end system resources which the non-power-saving option also apparently uses. So if you just change it to 'on' and restart your machine, it's magically smooth again. Amazing.

//Why have you forsaken the rest of us, 0 polygonal deities?//

Even so, some vocal community members are still dissatisfied. One forumite drew up a fake 3.0 patch notes list to point out how ungrateful people are being. "16-way local split-screen will be introduced" is a personal sarcastic highlight. Still, the game's playing better all the time and patch 1.5 is on its way, with Slightly Mad targeting 60fps (or as near as possible) everywhere in the next update. Who knows – maybe the lollipop man will even get some crew to hang out with in the pits before the sequel is out. It looks lonely in there... ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN PROJECT CARS THIS MONTH, MAKE IT...
A race at Suzuka-esque Sakitto as the sun sets.



"Attacking this was definitely a good idea, right gang? G-g...gang?"

Final Fantasy XV

Episode Duscae 2.0 is far more than the simple performance update we expected

Dev Square Enix / Pub Square Enix / Reporter Tom Stone

Can we take it as a good sign when a demo gets a more generous patch than most fully released games? We already knew about the incoming dodge roll and more combat options – and both make welcome additions. It's the new side quests that contain the best surprises. Now allies sometimes suggest breaking off from the foursome for their own quests. These vary from watching a dull meteor shower, to learning powerful new team attacks.

Once learnt, these can be triggered by your teammates in the thick of battle. They cue a series of timed attacks, your teamwork rewarded with massive damage. Nothing revolutionary, but they do break up the button-mashing combat. You can now loosely control how your sword strikes an enemy by holding the analog stick in your desired direction when slashing. It doesn't make a huge difference in the demo, but we

//Fans of the traditional *Final Fantasy* grind will be in heaven//

expect weak spots and shielded enemies might make it more necessary in the finished game.

Previously stuck in the background, one of the

Catoblepas (the huge monsters in the lake) now comes up on to land. You can fight it, but it takes about 20 minutes to take down even with a fully leveled party, and it can still crush you in one hit. New players will want to avoid it like the plague, but fans hankering for a traditional *Final Fantasy* grind will be in heaven.

Some framerate issues persist, and we still want to warp around the map, but both of these have improved and will hopefully continue to do so. This return to form is looking better every time we see it. ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN FFXV THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Picking mushrooms with Prompto. Trust us, a dull fetch quest has a twist.

THE OXM
REPLAY

Revisiting the
resolutionally-
challenged

Appearances can be
deceiving: here, you're
actually protecting
the politician.

Hitman: Blood Money

Exactly where the developer should look for future inspiration, says Martin Kitts



DETAILS

Dev IO Interactive

Pub Eidos

Interactive

Released

May 2006

Scored 8/10

Rarely does the announcement of a game's sequel come with a tacit apology for its predecessor, but that's what seems to have happened with the new *Hitman*. It's almost as if IO held its hands up and admitted that *Absolution* is indeed the Jar Jar Binks of *Hitman* games. In a world of micro-managed PR blandness, the candor is certainly appreciated. Everybody makes mistakes, after all.

Although *Absolution* wasn't a bad game, it was hardly what fans of the series had hoped for. After six years of waiting, all they wanted was a repeat of *Blood Money*, the exquisitely crafted labor of love that represented the pinnacle of *Hitman*'s genre of one.

The first three *Hitman* games each made tangible steps toward something truly special, but always with rough edges that needed polishing next

time around. Critically underrated at the time, *Blood Money* was where it all came together – the engaging story of *Silent Assassin*, the more forgiving gameplay of *Contracts*, and the ambition to rekindle the sense of wonder we had the first time we saw ol' barcode head in *Codename 47*.

Blood Money plays out like clockwork. Left alone, the world ticks along in perfect synchronization as each actor performs a designated routine. The delivery man arrives on schedule, the security guard glances away from his monitor, the party guest steps into the waiting elevator...

In the background Agent 47 watches, probing for opportunities. Removing variables from the equation, changing things here and there and watching for ripples. It's a sandbox full of potential but it's also a game of repetition. While it's easy to beat any level via brute force, *Blood Money*'s true depth is revealed through countless replays. A messy conclusion means increased notoriety for the publicity-shy Agent 47, and newspaper reports with increasingly accurate drawings

of 47's face start turning up in later missions. Returning to previously completed hits and trying a stealthier approach reduces notoriety and makes guards a bit less wary.

In one of the best known missions, A New Life, the target is a mob informant holed up in a posh neighborhood, guarded by FBI agents. It's probably the smallest level in the game but the number of possible approaches is daunting. Getting close is impossible without a disguise, but there are feds in a van nearby. Perhaps they might swap their clothes for some drugged donuts. Or, how about that clown who's been hired for the family's pool party? The neighbor's treehouse overlooking the garden – maybe there's a way into the basement, if only that guard dog wasn't so alert. Isn't the guy across the road a veterinarian?

This is all before you even get inside the house, where the guards watch impassively as the tipsy wife eyes up the pool boy, the glass roof of an outbuilding gleams dangerously and a gas-powered barbecue invites sabotage. In the teenage daughter's

//Perhaps the feds might
swap their clothes for some
drugged donuts//



This may look like a quiet, ordinary street, but just trust us – the possibilities for brutal murder are near endless.



INFLUENCED BY...
TENCHU:

STEALTH ASSASSINS
Ninja network from 1998.



INFLUENCE ON...
DISHONORED

Arkane's magic adventure shows similarities.

empty bedroom there's a glimpse of *Blood Money's* jet-black humor – if you douse the girl's panties with ether, you'll end up knocking out an FBI deviant when he sneaks in for a sniff.

There's a lot more to discover, too, or you could simply bypass the entire thing by bringing a sniper rifle, crouching in the garage opposite and shooting the target through his TV room window.

The bigger levels are every bit as detailed, and even if you've run through them a number of times it's unlikely that you'll have seen every permutation. *Blood Money* is alive with possibility, yet built on entirely predictable systems. Nobody uses psychic powers to see through your disguise, you know exactly where the target will be, and the game never penalizes you for doing things the wrong way. There is no wrong way. It's your game, your 47, your deadly clockwork toybox. ■



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Absolution ruined the disguise mechanic and turned *Hitman* into a game of shuffling behind low walls.

XBOX EXTRA

GAME ROULETTE



Publishers send OXM games. Loads of games. Good, bad and downright stinky. Every month, we delve into our Games Cupboard of Doom and replay a howler...

THIS MONTH...
50 CENT: BLOOD ON THE SAND

Our story begins when 50 Cent plays a concert in an unnamed Middle Eastern country for which he expects to be paid \$10 million in cash. How much does it cost to see a gig in Unnamed Middle Eastern Country that this could possibly be a good investment for the promoter? To

the surprise of 50 Cent, and no one else in the world, the poor music promoter

doesn't have ten million dollars. Instead, after bravely threatening to shoot the promoter in the chest, poor Fiddy has to begrudgingly accept a priceless diamond skull in payment. He might be the least sympathetic character we've ever played in a videogame, and we've completed *GTA V*.

After terrorists steal the diamond skull, which is possibly the least

terrifying thing a terrorist has ever done, 50 Cent tours the nation, killing hundreds in pursuit of material gain. Gameplay? More like shameplay. *Blood on the Sand* is a boring shooter with no new ideas of its own, utterly unremarkable bar its hateful protagonist who threatens people, treats women

// He might be the least sympathetic character we've ever played //

like dirt and expects to be paid ten million dollars a show. Trevor Phillips, all is forgiven.

But if you're a 50 Cent fan – just like we clearly are – you'll be absolutely delighted to hear that our hero actually recorded 18 new songs for this. Including a bizarre, yet appropriate, cover of *My Favorite Game* by The Cardigans. It plays over the end credits. Just complete the whole game if you don't believe us. It'll be worth it. Plus, Fiddy needs the money.



20 PERKS WE'D LIKE TO SEE IN FALLOUT 4

The Fallout games have always enabled you to customize your character's skillset by offering up a number of unique and weird perks – new abilities that change how the game plays. Here are 20 such boosts we'd like added to the post-apocalyptic RPG series' latest outing from the bunker...



01 Check Out My Very Tall Hat
You are now able to wear impractically tall hats. What a towering gent.

02 Daddy Long Legs
Your legs are now 25% longer, and a number of babies crawl around after you.

03 Bird is the Word
You develop super-hearing, but only for distant bird sounds.

04 Hello, I Am The Amazing Garbage Eating Man, Who The Hell Are You
You can now eat bottlecaps to recover small amounts of health.



10 Radder Scorpions
Radscorpions now wear cool shades and ride around the Wasteland on skateboards, flipping the bird to grown-ups and acting as if they own the place.

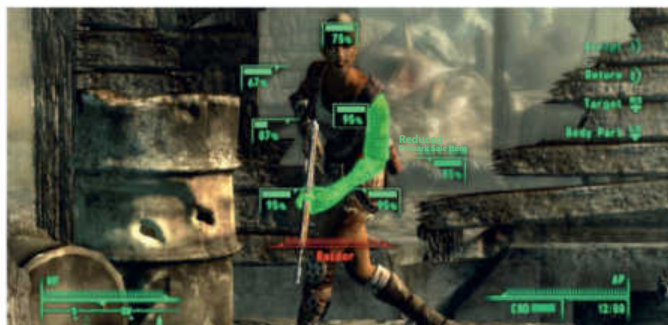
05 Dog Gone It
There's a 30% chance your dog will turn around mid-V.A.T.S. and bark a cheat code at you.

06 Red Tape Expert
Your custom-built shelters no longer require 17 arduous months of fighting with your state's planning department.

07 Hop Ons
Adds a 10% chance a Wasteland NPC will let you jump on their back and have them carry you around for the rest of the day.

08 Haggle King
Unlocks option to say, "Are you sure? Are you suuuuure?" while wagging your eyebrows for a 70% bartering discount.

09 Go Away, Rumbly Bob
You are now being followed by Rumbly Bob, a cool new NPC who makes your gamepad vibrate whenever he's near.



11 Mystery Shopper
During V.A.T.S it's now possible to select an item of an enemy's clothing and see where it was bought and if it was on sale.

12 Radio Gaga
A repeating, three-minute-long clip of a random episode of *This American Life* is now available on the Pip-Boy 3000.

13 Most Haunted
Animals killed in V.A.T.S. have a 5% chance of following you around the wasteland making spooky sounds and calling you names forever.

14 Tunnel Snakes Rule
All NPCs are now Tunnel Snakes because Tunnel Snakes rule!

15 Iron Stomach
Unlocks "Dare me to eat that whole thing?" dialogue option when in proximity to really big food, even when no other NPCs are nearby.

16 Regrettably Large Dog
Your dog is now ten times larger than it should be and

glitches through landscape and buildings due to its new size.

17 Keen Empath
While NPCs are speaking, you now have the ability to say "mm-hmm", "no way" and "yeah, yeah" while looking concerned.

18 Philosoph-O-Pocket
Cuts a hole in the bottom of your pocket. The inventory screen now contains every object in the world.

19 Master Thief
+10% to Sneaking, +15% to Lockpicking, +12% to Traps, +40% to Hiding Inside a Complete Set of Ornamental Medieval Armor.

20 Action Man
You gain an additional two action points in combat, though they must be used to turn the camera and say "check, please!"

NEXT ISSUE OF OXM ONSALE 15 SEP. SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE MONEY: SEE PAGE 58 FOR DETAILS

“IT’S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE.”



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XBOX ONE & WINDOWS 10 EXCLUSIVE

ALL FOR ONE, OR ONE TAKES ALL

FABLE LEGENDS

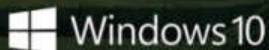


IT IS A TIME OF HEROES IN ALBION.

But while every fable needs a hero, every legend needs a villain.

Play for free and experience cross-device multiplayer on Xbox One* and Windows 10 PC.

FableLegends.com



*Requires Xbox Live Gold membership, sold separately. Game offers in-app purchases.

